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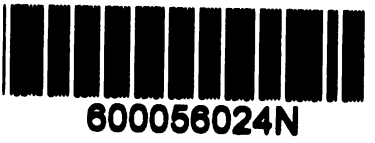
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THE

MOORS AND THE FENS.

BY

F. G. TRAFFORD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE MOORS AND THE FENS.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW FRIEND.

THERE were no bounds to the affection Miss Warmond had conceived, or professed to have conceived, for Mina Frazer: her parents had, no doubt, entertained a sort of love for the girl; Malcolm, possibly, might be fond enough of his sister; the laird and Allan were evidently deeply interested concerning her welfare; but to have seen and heard Miss Warmond, one really would have imagined that her very soul was wrapt up in her new friend; that Mina Frazer was to her, light, air, sunshine; that where she lived, happiness must ever abide.

Now, every one among us has probably met, at one period or other, some bright sunshiny face that claimed and received at once, without the usual dreary preliminary fee, called long acquaintance, a

portion of his regard, a corner in his memory, a very abundant share of friendship; and, therefore, to deny that occasionally an individual may jump into an intimacy, and not repent of his rashness afterwards, would be an absurdity. But for one person who leaps and finds good safe ground under his feet, fifty discover they have managed to entangle themselves in a very difficult quagmire. The rule is, that friendship, being an affair of sense and reason, and not a dream of sentiment, ought to be the result of long acquaintance and great watchfulness; and the exception that, as some people are possessed of the great art of making themselves liked at once, the acceptance of their hand in friendship is not an act always to be dreaded, though it may be well to perform even that simple operation with a sufficient amount of caution to lessen the risk of subsequent disappointment.

A limited number of individuals are perfectly irresistible: if they say, "You shall like me," they are sure to accomplish their purpose; and if one of this chosen band do occasionally work mischief, the victim is rarely blamed for being so absurdly "taken in," everybody knowing that some human beings, like some snakes, are impotent to repel the power of "fascination," and that it is not in the nature of

man to be always suspecting evil, more especially when it lies hidden under honied words and kind looks and noble sentiments.

And so, if Mina Frazer had been a peculiarly "captivating creature," a bright cheerful gladsome being, going about claiming a corner in every heart, a joyful greeting in every home, who had mixed much in society, and yet remained unspoiled by it, who went through the world gathering friends as others do enemies at each brief stopping-place, Miss Warmond might have professed an undying attachment for her on the occasion of a first interview, without incurring the imputation of telling fibs; but, as it unfortunately chanced that she was the enchantress, it resulted that Mina was the dupe of Cecilia, who succeeded to perfection in throwing all sorts of dust into the unsuspecting eyes of the laird's niece, a feat she had often successfully performed on the much keener orbs of wiser and older persons.

Mina Frazer was a girl to become gradually interested in, not perhaps to be taken with soon, but to remember for long; to value, not for any particular grace, or ease of manner, or felicity of expression, or striking beauty, but for the real genuineness of her character, the steadiness of her nature,

and the earnest truth and purity of her heart. It is said that extremes meet, that opposites agree, and if any one who had acquired the least insight into Miss Warmond, could have dreamt of believing her sincere in anything save her aversions, the above paradoxes might have accounted for the sudden affection she evinced towards Mina. But Cecilia denied that they were dissimilar in aught "save manner and, *perhaps*, appearance:" she said, "their tastes, thoughts, feelings were identical;" and her new friend believed this statement to be perfectly correct, for the General's daughter could "seem all things to all men,"—sneer with the scoffer and pray with the Christian; she laughed with the hopeful and sighed with the desponding; she had a clever story or witty repartee for those whose temperament was more mirthful than melancholy, and yet there was not a chord of sentiment, a tone of grief, she was not capable of sounding for the edification of the romantic, the world-tired, the unhappy.

Her mind was just like her piano, she could draw anything from it she pleased; whatever air was called for, whether joyful or sorrowful, plaintive or spirit-stirring, mournful or triumphant, holy or profane, came ready to order.

All she required was a hint as to the sort of

melody her auditor fancied; that sufficed, for simple ballad or brilliant bravura, slow dirge or rapid concerto, all seemed alike to her.

"She is so clever she can do anything," said her father.

Perhaps it might have been quite as well had fewer talents been entrusted to her keeping, for then she could not have been held accountable for the misuse of so many.

There is, however, a charm about real simplicity of character, which exercises a strange spell even over those whose minds are as full of twists and turns as was the Cretan labyrinth of old; and thus, perhaps, as Mina was by no means so accomplished or so handsome as Miss Warmond, and appeared, in that lady's eyes, in the light "of quite a chit of a child," it is just possible, at the bottom of the immense mountain of absurd pretence which the General's daughter raised and styled attachment, there may have originally existed a little grain of that indefinite article, liking, beyond which, staid, sensible people never go,—further than which it might be well for many never to venture.

Mina's boundless admiration probably flattered the vanity of one whose desire for praise was, indeed, almost unlimited; besides, Miss Warmond had

a few very cogent reasons for affecting, in the present instance, a fondness she was incapable of feeling; and accordingly she lavished such an amount of attachment on the girl, that Mr. Frazer felt quite gratified, and Mina wrote Miss Caldera a long letter full, as that lady drily remarked, of "Cecilia Warmond;" and Malcolm—who, whenever he once became enamoured of a face that pleased him, went on from stage to stage of absurdity till he grew tired of it, or saw something which pleased him better—began to think, in the superlative vanity and conceit of his boyish heart, that the Edinburgh belle, the heiress of Glenfiord, must have taken a fancy to his mother's darling,—that, in short, the lady's love for the sister was caused solely by her love for the brother; whilst Allan, who alone fully comprehended the whole business, sneered as he looked grimly on, for it was Cecilia Warmond who had contrived, with sweet smiles and sweeter words, to cast the shadow over Craigmaver, the cloud across the soul of Mina's clever cousin.

No mortal ever ventured within the magic circle of her attractions who passed out scatheless therefrom; no one who once gazed admiringly upon her, ever subsequently forgot that woman: she was not a being to be looked at, flirted with, talked to, flung

by, and forgotten, but a creature to remember, not for a few hours merely, but through life.

People liked her too soon, and despised her too late; nobody ever "found her out" in time: friend, suitor, enemy, it was just the same,—Cecilia, in due course, wrought sorrow for them all; if any one loved her with a lasting attachment, it was grievous to have to part from her; and it was a worse fate to stay long enough beside her to get a glimpse of the dark turnings of her heart, and yet not be able to leave the enchantress, whose songs had ceased to be melodious, whose tones struck harshly on the ear, whose smiles wearied the eye, whose artifices had no more power to delude; who, the more her captive struggled to be free, held him the tighter; who said to those desirous to become her slaves, "I want you not, away from my presence, and be happy if you can;" and to those who loathed the fetters they had once foolishly permitted her to bind around them, "I will never unloose the chain, and every effort you make to escape me only renders my determination stronger."

It was, perhaps, merely an act of retributive justice, that Allan Frazer, the most incorrigible flirt who ever existed, should finally meet with his "match" in the person of Cecilia Warmond; still

it was a hard fate. He had rushed willingly into the trap; and then he would have given all he possessed on earth to get out of it again: but he had caught the bait too greedily to escape the hook, and a hand, strong and cruel, though apparently weak and merciful, held the line,—and, spite of her assumed negligence and careless demeanour and teazing and tormenting, held it, as Allan well knew, securely also.

And for all this, the young man confessed he had nobody to thank but himself: he had fallen so desperately in love with Miss Warmond the season previously, when she first "came out" in Edinburgh, after various "comings out" in London, Paris, and elsewhere, that he had neglected every other pursuit, abandoned every other object, and devoted the whole of his thoughts, energies, and talents to one great end, namely, that of inducing her to care for him; and when, thanks to his being at that time the "rage," he had succeeded in effecting this purpose, he never rested, by night nor by day, till he had gained a promise from General Warmond, that whenever Cecilia was one-and-twenty she should become his wife. He had, in fine, managed, in the course of a few brief months, to get himself so hopelessly entangled with her and

her connections—to rush so far along the dangerous road leading to matrimony, without once seriously thinking of whom he actually intended to take for better, for worse—that when, before marriage, he contrived to do, what many of his relatives had accomplished after that event, namely, fall out of love again, he found, to his unspeakable dismay, that retreat was utterly impossible.

His grandfather beheld the lady in Edinburgh, just when Allan's affection for her was at fever heat; and the beauty, the vivacity, the grace, the position, the pretended high-mindedness, and the assumed amiability of the General's daughter, so completely captivated old Mr. Frazer, that, with a tremulous voice, he told the young man that the "dearest, proudest wish of his heart would be fulfilled when he brought her home to Craigmaver—a bride;" and thus matters progressed charmingly, till General Warmond and his daughter returned to Glenfiord, and invited Allan to go with them there.

Then, at last, light dawned on his eyes; and when they were opened, he beheld, like the disenchanted visitor to some fairy palace, deformity instead of beauty, affectation in the place of what he had fondly called candour; in fact, just as paper, on which words unintended to meet the common eye have

been traced, when held before the fire, presents, instead of its former pure white surface, dark tracings, whose very existence was previously unsuspected, so the apparent guilelessness of Cecilia's character, when presented calmly and steadily to view in the clear searching light of truth, was seen to be spotted all over with stains of hypocrisy, envy, uncharitableness, and selfishness.

He remained a fortnight to note the process, became restless, uneasy, unhappy, and returned to Craigmaver so altered, as to cause his grandfather to mourn over the fickleness of his character, to lament the change society and flattery, and the pomps and vanities of the world, had wrought in the soul of the boy he had educated and been proud of, as if he had been a still nearer relation than was actually the case—his own son.

The quondam lover dared not explicitly state the opinion he had recently arrived at about Miss Warmond; first, because it was not one great fact that could be related against her, but a series of little droppings that had made such fearful inroads on his affection; second, because he had heard the old remark cavillers made anent the inconstancy of his race in matters of the heart; and, as he knew himself sufficiently well to be compelled to admit he

could admire more ardently than steadily, he was aware that if he confessed the whole state of affairs to his grandfather, he would only be met with charges of changeableness and caprice, from which, on account of various foregone circumstances, he should be perfectly unable to clear himself.

Besides, what was the use of speaking! it was utterly impossible for him to draw back now with honour: if he jilted the girl whom he had professed to adore, it would blast his own prospects and break his uncle's heart; and, besides, if Miss Warmond really cared for him—which vanity whispered was more than possible—he must marry her, there was no help for it. Fifty times a day Allan cursed his overhaste and his folly and his unlucky destiny, in terms that would have alarmed the old laird's piety had he heard him: and thus, pining and fretting, because of the chain he had doomed himself to wear, the young man dragged over a few weeks, at the expiration of which time Mina and her brother arrived at Craigmaver.

During those weeks, however, a sort of comprehension of the storm raging within his grandson's bosom had dawned on the old laird's brain, and the very day before their relative's arrival he asked Allan abruptly,

"Do you repent this engagement?"

"Bitterly," was the answer, which almost involuntarily escaped the happy lover's lips; "but there is no use in talking, I cannot recede; I have gone too far for that: if beggaring myself could free me, I would relinquish every shilling I possess; I would give up every dream of fame, every hope in life, to have my liberty restored, to undo ever having seen or spoken to Cecilia Warmond."

"I never had but one fault to find with this alliance, Allan," responded the laird, sadly; "I feared you were too unsteady to make any woman permanently happy: you have been flattered and caressed by the beautiful and the amiable till you have grown like a spoiled child, dissatisfied with everything; you weary of the loveliest faces and the most interesting pursuits the moment they lose the charm of novelty; my conviction is," he added, earnestly, "that Miss Warmond is too good to throw herself away on a ridiculous fellow, who has not the sense to value the pure sterling love of such a creature, when he knows himself to be actually in possession of it."

"I hope you may always think so, sir," responded Allan, as he turned to leave the room; "and I only wish you could persuade Miss Warmond to become

a convert to your opinion. However," he continued, noticing the shade that came over his grandfather's face, "I have no intention of running off my engagement; I shall marry whenever the proper time comes: meanwhile, all I ask is no conversation on the subject: I must endeavour to forget her for a space, and try whether absence will, in my unfortunate case, make 'the heart grow fonder.'"

And accordingly from that hour the lady's name was never mentioned at Craigmaver till she herself appeared there, for Mr. Frazer had great faith that separation and silence would rekindle the flame; and Allan, feeling that when near Mina he breathed a purer atmosphere than was his wont, not merely, during the course of the month succeeding her arrival, strove to forget Miss Warmond altogether, but occasionally succeeded in this laudable object.

For he was, indeed, fickle as the winds; and, though, had any one told him he was "getting up a flirtation with Mina, his cousin," she who had been so lately a child, he would indignantly have rejected the idea; yet there cannot be a doubt that he was travelling very fast towards it, when Miss Warmond's unexpected visit to Locholen startled him from his dream, and roused him to a full memory of

how he was situated, whom he had proposed for, ay, and actually intended to marry.

He would fain have kept Mina and her apart; but Mr. Gordon knew of the advent of his cousins, and he could not deny that they were still at Craigmaver: he pleaded Mina's delicacy as an apology for deferring a visit to some indefinite period; but the General's daughter was too skilful a tactician to be so put off. See the new arrival she was determined she would; indeed, the instant she had heard of the flutter of a petticoat having been noticed on the lawn of Allan's home, her curiosity had become painfully excited, and accordingly she volunteered to lay aside all ceremony, and "come and make friends with the old laird's niece," of whom she had heard so much ever since her arrival in Scotland.

And finding Mina as unlike a rival as can well be imagined, she took the girl thenceforth under her caressing hand, petted and fondled her, and treated her as if she had been a favourite kitten; and poor Mina, never once imagining aught so beautiful could ever treat her unkindly, gave herself up altogether to the care of the lovely vision, who had glanced so unexpectedly across her path.

Locholen was such a distance from Craigmaver, Cecilia found it impossible to see as much as she

desired of her new friend, so she appeared one day in a handsome open carriage, and carried Mina off bodily with her; but when pressed by the laird to come and spend a little time with his niece, she answered, shaking her curls till their brightness arrested the very sunbeams and caused them to fling rich golden shades on the tresses of her luxuriant hair,

"No, no, the dear grandpapa at home could not do without me at all; I cannot leave him during my brief visit, even for a day;" and so Mina passed the greater portion of a fortnight at Locholen, during which period Miss Warmond, by dint of a little judicious feminine cross questioning, contrived to get everything out of her she wanted to know, which, in plain English, meant that Mina was so foolish as to tell her all the particulars of her life, all about her uncle and Malcolm, and Mr. Westwood and Miss Caldera, and Ernest Ivraine, and everybody and everything; and the young lady, when she had read her through like a book, breathed freely and felt satisfied.

She had never met any one who resembled his niece, she assured the Laird of Craigmaver; there was a something so perfectly natural and unsophisticated about her, so different from the generality of

the girls she had known, it really was quite refreshing to talk with her; and, in fine, she did talk so effectually to all, that it was ultimately agreed Mina should return with her to Glenfiord, and General Warmond politely hoped "Mr. Frazer, his grandson, and nephew would accompany them also."

"Should you like to have a peep at your old home, my pet?" demanded Miss Warmond of the girl, when she had fairly set matters in train to effect the grand explosion she contemplated; "should you like to see Ben Lomond and Loch Lomond, and the flowers and the fields and the trees of Glenfiord once more?"

"I should be so glad," answered Mina, after a pause, "so very glad to see it, only — only — I should be so sorry."

"Not to come and be my sister there for a while, surely?" said the other; "you have not lost that home, remember, you have only changed it, as you will again change your present one for a brighter and a happier; think of it in that light: let me take you back there and we will talk about anything you like under the shadow of the hills, sitting beside the waterfalls, looking over the silent lake."

Mina gazed into the distance, as if, at the end of some long vista of silent thought, she beheld

Glenfiord beckoning to her: all her childhood's memories came gently up before her—the old haunting sorrow, the happiness of the present, the possibilities of the future; and at length her heart became so full of feelings, half sorrowful, half pleasant, that she laid her head on her friend's shoulder and burst into tears; for the silly child had a way of crying whenever her father or her old home was mentioned, for which Cecilia secretly despised her.

"She does not weep," thought that amiable individual, "for things worth crying about,—for the want of society and equipages, and excitement; but she maudles concerning a man who has been dead for years, and a place which, though well enough in its way, is nothing remarkable." Yet, spite of this soliloquy, the young lady bent down her head and kissed the broad smooth forehead, and said, by way of diverting her thoughts, and turning them into a pleasanter channel,

"You shall see everything about the place, if you will come, from the new wine cellar up to my eccentric cousin, who lives there, and housekeeps for me."

"I never heard you speak of her before," answered Mina.

"Well, she was not worth speaking about; she is

a most exemplary piece of mechanism, — always keeps in time, never gets out of tune; is made up of conscientiousness, religion, and economy; has not a single idea beyond strict decorum, tidiness, and cleanliness, though she is trying to acquire one or two more to please a clergyman who astonished us all one day by proposing for her, after we had set her down as an old maid,—a Glenfiord fixture, who was to go on having things made comfortable for the household generally till the end of time. Principle and propriety are her virtues; she possesses no others, and she has no foibles or sins, unless, indeed, not thinking very highly of me can be classed as one of the latter."

"Does she not think highly of you, then?" demanded Mina.

"No, she has not nearly so good an opinion of me as she ought," replied Miss Warmond, laughing. "I am not neat enough, nor economical enough, to suit her ideas; perhaps when I am as old as she I may improve: meantime, however, she imagines I am far from what I ought to be."

"That is strange," said Mina; "I thought nobody in the world could wish you to be different from what you are."

"Oh! but then you are not a prim, stiff, starched-

up old maid," suggested the other; "I often wonder what could have attracted her reverend suitor, for she is not rich or beautiful or accomplished or anything."

"Is not she good?" asked Mina, and the question, simple though it was, brought a colour into her friend's cheek, as she hastily answered,

"To be sure, she is; perfectly, unexceptionably good: but mere goodness, you are aware, is occasionally rather uninviting."

"Perhaps so," said Mina; "but still it is valuable, for all that: and what," she added, after this little hint, which was given more innocently than hint ever was, "what is he—the clergyman—like?"

"He! not what either you or I would choose," responded Miss Warmond; "but he is well enough, and has a little money, and everybody agrees is quite good enough for her. He wears shoes an inch thick in the sole, it is true, and despises etiquette, and 'values only the mind, and not the setting,' he says—which inuendo I always pretend not to understand—and, oh! he is just another piece of mechanism, wound up to perform certain duties in a certain manner: they will get on capitally together; you shall see him when you come, and every other individual of note who visits at my present quiet

home; I suppose it won't be my home for very long, though."

"Why, is General Warmond going to sell it?" abruptly demanded Mina, a wild yearning for wealth to purchase it rising in her bosom.

"No, silly one," responded the other, "I said *my* home, not his."

Her friend gazed earnestly in her face for a moment; then, as if she had solved a mystery, she exclaimed,

"You must be going to be married; is not that it?"

"Perhaps!" was the reply.

"You said, a minute or two ago, that clergyman was not what either you or I would choose for a husband. I have never reflected about choosing any, but you must; please tell me what he is like?"

"Wonderfully like your cousin Allan," said Miss Warmond, smiling.

"Is it he? are you going to marry him, are you really?" Mina demanded; and as the words "I am" fell on her ear, she cried, flinging her arms around the neck of her relative that was to be, "Oh! I am so glad—so very glad; then we shall be cousins, next to sisters, you know, dear, dear, Cecilia."

Dear Cecilia felt quite gratified at this way "of

receiving the news," for it proved conclusively that Mina had never entertained any evil designs on the pre-occupied heart of Allan Frazer; still it did strike her as something remarkable that the matter should never have been named before such close connexions; and she, therefore, to make assurance doubly sure, inquired,

"Did your cousin never tell you we were engaged?"

"Never," was the answer.

"Strange," half murmured Miss Warmond; then added, "well, you must not mention the matter to any one till I give you permission; promise me you won't, even to your brother."

"I promise," said Mina; and, after that brief sentence had passed her lips, she would as soon have dreamt of cutting off her right hand as of betraying a trust, no matter of what nature, which had once been confided to her: and that Miss Warmond possessed penetration enough to know; wherefore she had done, what ladies are sometimes in the habit of doing, sounded the girl by telling her a secret, and bidding her keep it safely.

CHAPTER II.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

"And so, Mr. Malcolm, ye 're goin to take a man's look over the place your sister first opened her eyes to the light of heaven in."

It was Colin Saunders who spoke the above sentence; and Mina's brother who responded, as he pulled a flower to pieces and scattered the leaves carelessly on the ground,

"Well, Colin?"

"Weel," repeated Saunders, a little tartly; "many a one says weel, weel, when it ne'er was waur wi' them." And, after concluding the above sententious remark, he looked with such a meaning glance at his auditor, that the young gentleman was induced to demand, more hastily than politely,

"What the devil he meant."

"The deevil and me has no sort of connexion," remarked Colin gravely, "further than the universal

one Adam and Eve made up with him by partaking of his food, the apple, off the tree of knowledge, which brought sin and death into the world, and——"

"Oh! stop your preaching, Saunders," interposed Malcolm; "I never could stand sermonizing, even in my youngest days; and, since I left Scotland, I have been knocking too much about the world, and have met too many kinds of people, to have learned to 'stand fire' a single bit better than ever."

"The Lord takes his own time," groaned forth the man; "but," he added,—noticing his late master's son removing one foot from the stump of an old tree, preparatory to finishing the discussion by "moving off,"—"but I had not the design of taking the work of reforming you in hand myself, believing it would be useless; all I wanted to ask was, if you would be so obliging as not to couple my name and that of him that 's no canny together in a single sentence."

"Well, I 'll try not," said Malcolm; "but it can do you no harm, and it is, after all, only a habit I have got; I suppose swearing is a sort of sin, but still I like it, and so I go on with it, as with smoking and one or two other accomplishments I learnt in the navy."

"There is many a thing, sir, ye like besides what ye learned in the navy that won't benefit ye much, either here or hereafter."

"Indeed; I am not aware——" commenced Malcolm, with a very abortive attempt at a guiltless demeanour.

"That a pretty face could mak' you do ony single folly in the world; that you are fonder of sitting beside a woman's piano, galloping wi' her over the moors, and walking wi' her through the gardens, than of going bravely out and working like a man. Tak' care, Master Malcolm Frazer, tak' care."

"Of what?" demanded that personage.

"Of her," replied Colin, "of the lady all Craigmaver, that is, all the gentlefolk part of it, has run mad, I think, about: the General's handsome daughter, Miss Cecilia Warmond."

"Why, you don't think that she is in any imminent peril, that you bid me have such especial charge of her, do you?" said Mr. Frazer, wilfully misinterpreting the man's words.

"I do not think *she* is in any great danger, except what she may choose to make for herself; but I am sure you are," replied the gardener: "it maybe won't kill you—such like, seldom do—but you 'll get yourself hurt; and if I were Mr. Malcolm Frazer, I

would neither go to Glenfiord myself nor let Miss Mina be for ever on wi' the mistress of it."

The youth turned first red and then pale; but determining not to be "worsted" by Colin, he answered,

"As to myself, I am pretty competent, I fancy, to keep out of harm's way; and, with regard to the young lady, what possible injury she can have done you or yours, I confess is a mystery to me."

"I never said she did me or mine an injury, but I do say she will, maybe, do you and yours one, some day or other; however, I see I might as well try to stop the rivers from running as to turn a gentleman on to the right gait, when he has once made up his mind to take the wrang. I never do go out of my way and say a word against those whom my betters have taken a fancy to, but I repent it;" and Colin commenced hacking and hewing away at an unfortunate tree he had been engaged in pruning in a more scientific manner, before Mr. Frazer's advent set his brains rambling to other and more important subjects.

"I think you are perfectly incorrigible, Colin," said the young man; "you are just the same as I remember you years ago: not the least changed in any one respect."

"Well," answered Saunders, "I am sure I might say the same of my old master's son, for what he had as a boy, I see he has carried up to manhood with him; but I did not mean to offend ye, sir: I am sorry if I have done so, only as I know it would have been well for Mr. Allan if he had never looked twice in that lady's face, I thought I would just make so free as to give you a hint, which, as I might have expected, you don't feel obliged to me for; and I hope, sir, you may never find my words come true. And now I have no more to say, except that I trust the Lord will take better care of you and that kindly-hearted child Miss Mina (who, I thank God, is *not* changed) than either of you seem willing or able to do for yourselves:" and, as Malcolm, after muttering, "A pious finale to a prosy sentence," strolled off, whistling, the old man gave over pruning, and stood sadly gazing at his retreating figure till it disappeared altogether, when he exclaimed,

"You will have sense taught you some time or another: I hope it wunna come to you as it did to your father, too late to benefit either him or those who were near to him. Ah, well-a-day! to think o' *his* children going back to that place wi' her."

Poor Colin did more than think about them going, for he saw their departure.

"I never saw good come of a woman who could not keep her mouth quiet, who was for ever smiling or laughing or singing or talking or something," he soliloquised. "There surely is a 'thraw' in her, some place, she wants to hide, or she would let herself be at peace sometimes, if it was but by way o' variety."

And one other person in the world besides Saunders had grown weary of the eternal brightness of Cecilia's face, who journeyed to Glenfiord as he would to a funeral, and took up his abode there as he might in a cell in Newgate.

He said he was ill, to account for his lack of spirits, and the laird, who thought he really was so, backed this assertion so warmly that their host grew quite uneasy about him, and Cecilia tormented him with so many kindnesses that he often ungallantly wished she were lying at the bottom of the lake; whilst Malcolm, who, in such cases, was blind as an owl with the light shining full on him, fancied his cousin was jealous of the progress he had made in Miss Warmond's affections, and Mina and the quiet mechanical cousin wondered and surmised, but said nothing.

It had been a source of much astonishment to Mina to find the said "cousin" a placid, amiable looking person of about thirty, with no token of extreme eccentricity about her, who seemed to have only one object and aim in life, and that to make others happy, and to forget herself as completely as if such an individual had no place on the outside of the round ball we live on; and it had been a still greater matter of surprise to her, when, on the night of their arrival, she heard—after Cecilia had kissed her twenty times and wished her pleasant dreams and departed—first, a gentle tap at her chamber door, and then beheld the door opened, without ceremony, by Miss Lynd, who walked in and closed it after her.

"Do you ever take advice?" asked the lady, gazing from the elevated point of view, which superiority of height gave her, on the girl, who, having been engaged, ere she entered, in the task of settling her long refractory tresses for the night, stood now, brush in hand, contemplating her unexpected visitor. "Do you ever take advice?"

"Sometimes, if I like it," responded Mina, a vivid memory of Miss Caldera's rejected counsel recurring to her.

"But if it happen to be good would you refuse

to accept advice, solely because it might seem a little disagreeable?"

"Well, no," returned Mina, after a pause, "not if I thought it good too."

"Do you, then, never take anything on trust?" was the next question.

"Scarcely ever."

"Not even a friend?" Miss Lynd inquired.

Mina made no answer, but fastened her eyes on the other's face as she proceeded:

"In a general way I permit people to plod along their several paths without dreaming of interfering with them; but you are so young, I have thought it my duty to give you this warning—never make a confidante of one you have not known well and long; place nothing in anybody's power, and believe that occasionally a fair exterior may conceal a false heart."

"Do you mean to imply——?" commenced Mina, indignantly.

"Nay, nay, do not get into a passion; you think me prejudiced, eccentric, odd, I know,—in fact ere you came here you were possibly taught to expect to meet something decidedly peculiar; and, perhaps, trouble, which has not spared me, may have made me different from my happier fellows: but still I

am a great deal older than you; and, because of your extreme youth, because you have no mother or sister or friend near, I have come to say, that the less of your private affairs you tell any one, in the course of your passage through life, the greater is the probability of your making that passage smoothly and safely. Read the hint as you please, apply it as you choose, repeat it if you will; I have performed my duty: good night;" and, as she had appeared, so she vanished, abruptly and rapidly, leaving Mina to complete the brushing and disentangling of her hair, after having supplied some new thoughts to keep her company and prevent her mind from stagnating during the process.

Early the next day Mina arose, and, flinging open her window, gazed over the scene that lay sleeping peacefully beneath her, bathed in the sunshine of morning; it was so early that not one of the household, excepting a few of the servants, was stirring, and all looked so exquisitely still and quiet, that she felt as if no better opportunity were likely to present itself, during her stay at Glenfiord, for a lonely visit to the abiding place of the only friend she possessed, who had lain him down to rest in the land of his birth, under the shadow of the mighty Ben Lomond: and accordingly, tying on the rustic

hat she had worn since her arrival in the Highlands, she quitted the house, and crossing the gardens and passing through the plantations, arrived ere long at the enclosure, wherein reposed generations who after 'life's fitful fever' slept there 'well.'

She pushed the rusty iron gate open and walked up to the corner, where a plain marble slab, bearing the name of Allan Frazer, covered the dust of him whose child she was. She stood for a minute or two motionless; but then, flinging the flowers she had carried with her on the grave, she crept close down to the ground, as if that brought her somehow nearer to him, and, laying her face on the damp grass, she wept, as most of us have, at one time or other, over the last home of a loved and dear relative for ever departed.

"Is it now ye are beginning to miss him, poor bairn?" said a harsh voice in a kindly tone at her side; and Mina, starting up, found herself face to face with the sexton's wife, who had known her when a child, known her and him and all of them.

"I am not *beginning* to miss him now, Margery," she answered; "I have felt it just the same always, only time, perhaps, has softened the trial and reconciled me to it."

"Ye 'll feel his loss more yet than ye have ever

done," was the consolatory reply; "and that minds me, Mr. Allan sent me out to bring ye away from the grave and the wet grass: see how your gown is pairfectly dreeping; come in and get it dried, if ye are no set to kill yersel'," and the worthy woman fairly dragged Mina into her wretched abode, where, half-choked with smoke and surrounded by a swarm of dirty, hungry children, she managed, with the assistance of a blazing wood fire, to dry her garments; during which operation her hostess entertained her alternately with laments of the family that "was gone," and commendations of the family that "had come," applying the corner of her apron to her eyes one minute, as she related some instance of liberality on the part of the late Captain Frazer, "who was the best gentleman that ever lived;" and brightening up the next, when she told how Miss Warmond had given the children dresses a-piece the Christmas before, and new bonnets at Easter, and "behaved like a real born lady, as everybody knew her to be."

"Come, Mina, are you ready?" said her cousin Allan at length, putting his head in at the door and speaking through a dense mass of smoke and dust; and, thankful to escape from the woman's garrulous details and endless reminiscences, she at once re-

plied that she was, and went out to join him, after placing such a souvenir in Margery's hand as caused her to be ranked from thenceforth as something little, if at all, lower than a duchess.

"Now, little one, you are not to do that foolishness again, remember," were the only words her cousin spoke to her during the progress of their homeward walk: he was commencing, indeed, another sentence, when the appearance of Cecilia Warmond, who came tripping across the garden bright and fresh as ever, cut it short.

"You are a pretty pair," she said laughing; "I concluded you had run off together, and papa was just suggesting the advisability of a pursuit to Gretna, whilst my cousin, in a state of tranquil despair at being put out of her usual methodical course, has sat down to read Shakespeare before breakfast—only think of that—Shakespeare with the "beauties," for fear she might not be able to find them out herself. Now what apology have you to offer for thus setting a whole household in disorder, turning my cousin's brain upside down by upsetting her whole system of domestic management, and forcing her to begin the day at the wrong end?"

Mina had heard such sentences as the foregoing uttered perpetually by her friend without ever once

thinking they were out of place; but, fresh from a graveyard, newly arrived in a place which brought all sorts of memories back to her mind, the words jarred upon her feelings, and, for the first time in her life, she fancied Cecilia a little flippant. Could it be that the doubt Miss Lynd had whispered in her ear was taking effect? She had no time to analyse the matter, for Allan, after apologizing as best he might for their long delay, led Miss Warmond into the breakfast room, while Mina ran back to her own apartment to arrange her costume and render it altogether, as Malcolm would have said, "presentable."

That day Cecilia made herself more charming than ever; there was no end to her affection for her guest: whatever Mina liked, she liked; whatever the other wished, she was delighted with; she gave her a lesson on the guitar; she had the quietest horse in the stable brought round for her to try; she was wonderfully solicitous about her friend's health; declared early rising was most injurious to the constitution; made Malcolm take them a row on the lake by moonlight, as Mina was romantic and liked moonlight, and was so obliging as to teach both of them a form of invocation to the moon, which invocation had reference to the future partner fate had

in store for them, and the answer whereto was to be conveyed through the rather uncertain medium of a dream.

The following morning she inquired first of Mina what vision had appeared to her; and, after receiving an answer, which she deemed a fib, to the effect that the girl had not been favoured with any lunar reply, she turned to Malcolm, and demanded of whom he had dreamt.

"Of you," said that young gentleman, which impertinent and most untrue response caused Miss Warmond to blush most becomingly, and declare he was "perfectly unbearable," while Mina wished greatly, that Cecilia either would cease flirting with Malcolm—or, rather, encouraging him to flirt with her—or else permit her to tell him the grand secret she was not then at liberty to reveal, viz., the engagement subsisting between Miss Warmond and Allan Frazer.

For though Mina would not at first admit such an idea, there could not be a doubt but that the poison was beginning to work. Suspicion—that many-eyed fiend—had been set on the trail of Cecilia's errors; and when once a correct scent is given, we know how fast it is possible to follow it, particularly when it leads to anything disagreeable. Hitherto, it had

been Mina's habit only to look for virtues in her friend, but now she had an eye for the failings also, a sort of distrust—of what she scarcely knew—having been infused into her. Ere she had been quite a week at Glenfiord, she had absolutely detected Cecilia covertly sneering at her three times in the prettiest manner conceivable, and she detected her fibbing twice and flirting, whenever an opportunity presented itself, always. Cecilia was not perfect: Mina found that fact out in an incredibly short space of time after her arrival at Glenfiord, and, like many another person in the world, she felt a little inclined to be angry with her friend for not possessing all the qualities she had most absurdly imagined her to be endowed with.

The veil soon dropped partially from her eyes; ere long it fell altogether, and she beheld Cecilia, not as she seemed, but very much as she actually was.

For Mina now saw Cecilia under different circumstances from those under which they had first become acquainted; and Miss Warmond, by dint of ceaseless watching, came to know that Allan Frazer's malady was not a bodily one, that his affection for her was most sensibly diminished, and that he entertained altogether too high an opinion of his

cousin to suit her uncommonly strict ideas of propriety.

"What beautiful hair you have," Mina said, as the junior portion of the Glenfiord party stood, one bright sunshiny day, among the flowers of the garden, "what beautiful hair you have," and Mina, as if the fact had never struck her so forcibly before, twisted one of the long silken curls round her finger while she spoke.

"Not more so than your own," responded Miss Warmond, who could afford to praise a 'decidedly inferior article,' "as, I have no doubt, some people in England would tell you if they were here."

"Don't teach the child folly," interposed Allan Frazer a little sharply, "she will learn nonsense in the world soon enough when she mixes with it, believe me."

The blood mounted even to Cecilia's temples at these words, which, had the speaker reflected a minute, he would never have uttered, and she quickly retorted,

"You would like to have the instructing her in all kinds of lore entirely to yourself, signor, I doubt not; well, be it so: she is not altogether such a child but that she will make an apt pupil. Is not your cousin becoming a perfect Goth?" she added, turn-

ing to Malcolm, with a laugh; and that young gentleman gladly declared he was, and rejoiced in his heart to see how savage Allan looked, not that he disliked the laird's grandson, but it proved, he thought conclusively, what fair way he himself must be making in the good graces of their hostess, who, from that day, treated Mina with a sort of sarcastic fondness, which estranged them more than any actual unkindness could have done. Just as a cunning mischievous boy lures a dog up to him by all sorts of devices, by tones of encouragement, by calling 'poor fellow,' holding out a bone, and fifty other treacherous expedients, to the end that, when he has got the animal within reach, he may give him a sly kick or a sound thrashing and send the creature away howling; so Cecilia would spend half a day, sometimes in making herself fascinating to Mina, and then deal her a telling blow, which was struck nobody could say how, and felt nobody but the actors could point where, but the sharp pain of which, nevertheless, frequently kept Mina weeping for hours after she had laid her head on her pillow.

She could not have repeated the words containing the sting: it was a thing to be felt, not seen, heard, or repeated. In the art of irony Cecilia was an adept; thus she wounded her visitor under cover

of a compliment, and, by pretending to be a useless being, good for nothing but accomplishments, not by the one half so intellectual and learned as Mina, she effectually turned every scrap of knowledge the girl called her's into ridicule, and by a process, imperceptible to any eyes save those of her victim and Allan Frazer, succeeded in making her so miserable, and placing her in so very inferior a position, that one morning, when a letter arrived from London, requiring her return on account of her mother's indisposition, Mina felt as if heaven had suddenly opened before her, she was so rejoiced to get away from Glenfiord, and leave her persecutor hundreds of miles behind.

To have heard Miss Warmond begging her to stay, if it were only for one other week, any person might have arrived at the conclusion which delighted the old laird of Craigmaver, that the girls were bosom friends, and likely for ever to remain so; but, if her mother had been at the point of death, Mina could not more strenuously have urged the necessity of her immediate departure, and Malcolm, to his sister's unutterable thankfulness, wished to be gone also: so without any unnecessary delay they bade "good bye" to the hills and the waters of their native land and the people who dwelt there,

and set off on their long journey to that mighty city both of them now called "home."

Mina had clung for an instant round her dear old uncle's neck, and a tear had fallen on his face as she said farewell; she had looked sadly at Allan's troubled countenance, and gazed back again and again at Glenfiord; but still, though the sorrow of departure hung heavy on her soul, it was not the passionate unmixed sorrow of her childhood; she had learnt one lesson from her northern tour, namely, that happiness abides not in place; that true hearts make pleasant homes anywhere; that there is a treasure of more account than beautiful scenery or lovely faces—pure affection, which can, thank God, dwell in hovels, and exist in atmospheres killing to mawkish sentiment and pretence, and which is to be found in the bosoms of those whose countenances are stained and weather-beaten, furrowed by time and seamed by trouble. Mina had learnt a great deal; so Miss Caldera thought.

"Well, dear," said that sterling friend, as she poured out scalding tea for her and Malcolm on the night of their return, "well, dear, did your visit realise *all* your anticipations?"

"Not quite," was the rejoinder.

"And Miss Warmond, whom you were so fond of, has she proved all you expected——?"

"She has proved the most confounded flirt I ever met," burst in Malcolm, to the astonishment of both ladies; after which remarkable assertion, he hurried through his meal in silence, and then sulkily ascended to his mother's room.

"And so, dear foolish child, you are not, on the whole, sorry to be back here once again," said Miss Caldera.

"Sorry!" repeated Mina, "I 'm very glad; I will tell you all some time if I can: I do not want to see the Highlands again till I can carry you all there with me; and I have brought the cairngorm quite safe, indeed I have, it is in my trunk upstairs."

"And the heart, Mina?"

"I left it behind in the old places when I was a child; but it has come back to England with me this time," she answered.

"I had fancied your cousin, Allan——"

"Oh!" broke in Mina, "you don't know about Allan; he is so clever and talented and altered, I would not have known him; and, besides——"

"Well, Mina?"

"Well, you see, though I don't think it could

do any harm to tell you, still I promised not, and——"

"Quite right," said Miss Caldera; "so that is the way of it, is it? and do you feel very glad?"

"I did, but I am not sure I do now," was the reply; and Mina, by way of a finale to some unspoken train of thought, put her arm round the governess's neck, and kissed her over and over again. "I often imagined when I was away," she said, "I had not been half fond enough of you; but I will be now, and never grow cross or impatient or discontented any more."

"Don't be too sure," answered Miss Caldera, laughing; we shall know more about that when you are next tempted."

"Well, I will love you from this night twice as much as ever I did," replied Mina, colouring.

"Love me just the same, and keep the affection unchanged through time; that will be a deal better for both of us," remarked Miss Caldera, earnestly: and Mina acquiesced in the truth of this observation so meekly, that the lady thanked the fates for having sent her former refractory charge to Scotland, and taming her so effectually when they got her there.

"I only hope it may last," murmured Miss Cal-

dera, as she stole silently up the stairs of her relative's house, and thus went noiselessly, and more tranquilly than usual, to rest.

CHAPTER III.

MARRY IN HASTE, ETC.

YES! Mrs. Frazer was ill, and John Merapie silent, and Mr. Westwood in existence, and Miss Caldera truthfully candid as ever, and Belerma Square had not grown one whit more cheerful during hér absence, and yet still Mina was glad, thankful to be back. It is true she did not quite comprehend the deliberate badness of Miss Warmond's nature: much as she had seen, much as she had discovered, she did not fully understand the utter worthlessness and deceit which were covered by so fair a mantle of beauty and of grace; but she had found out enough, and suffered sufficiently, to render her grateful to leave luxury and scenery and fashion behind, and find herself once more amongst those who pretended nothing, but loved her much.

Miss Caldera was right: the girl had learnt a great deal when she returned to be contented in John

Merapie's town house. She had taken her first lesson in the world, tasted one drop out of the cup of fashionable life, and found it wonderfully bitter; she had become convinced that one word of praise or kindness uttered by a sterling steady friend, aye, even a sentence of warning or rebuke spoken by such an one in loving sincerity, is more really valuable than all the deceitful compliments and flattering falsehoods which hollow hearts can dictate and fulsome tongues whisper.

She returned, not very strong perhaps, but still much better, with a colour in her cheek and a light in her eye, and a style in her manner, carriage, and deportment, which she had learnt from Cecilia. For she was at that age when association is everything, when accent is improved, an air of fashion conferred, ideas of elegance implanted, by being brought into contact with persons whose every movement, tone, gesture, tells that they have mixed in *le beau monde*, and that its usages and customs and ceremonies are familiar to them as household words. "Wonderfully improved in appearance," even her mother thought her. She retained her former manner, it is true, but the brusqueness, living in a secluded solitary kind of way had formerly caused her to acquire, was almost gone; the tone of her voice bordered

occasionally on the very confines of liveliness, her step had lost its languor, her face its melancholy; quiet and reserved she seemed still at intervals, but, taking her on the whole, a decided change for the better had been effected by her Highland trip; perhaps the mountain air might have benefited her health, which, for a considerable period previous to her departure—indeed, almost from her childhood—was anything rather than good; perhaps the "rubbing up" she had got, the mixing with other people besides her own exclusive home circle, the being drawn out of herself and forced to think of others and their concerns, exercised a beneficial influence on her mind; perhaps the glimpse she had gained of "fairy land," of fine ladies and clever gentlemen, and the other beings who move in that sphere we call, *par excellence*, 'the fashionable world,' had tended to reconcile her considerably to a mere terrestrial common-place existence in Belerma Square: at all events Mina came home to her uncle's, altered, —not for the worse.

And if, after the first peaceable fortnight, she and Miss Caldera did again commence to have various little "tilts" of opinion, still they never signified, and were by no means so frequent as of yore, for the governess had apparently arrived at the determina-

tion of permitting Mr. Alfred Westwood to manage his matrimonial plans as best he could without her interference; and as this was the only point on which she and Mina had been wont to have arguments, that might almost have been termed quarrels, they plodded on together without any greater differences of opinion arising between them than served to prevent their tongues growing rusty by want of sufficient exercise.

Occasionally, indeed, Malcolm became a very serious bone of contention for both to try their teeth on, for that young gentleman, whose chances of a commission seemed far off as ever, grew day by day so much more useless and indolent and fashionable than had been his wont before, (and "Goodness knows," said Miss Caldera, "he was bad enough in those respects always") that the worthy governess at last fairly lost all patience on the subject, and frequently asserted, "He ought to be ashamed of himself."

"But what can he do?" demanded Mina, who was very fond and proud of her brother, "what can he do?"

"Work," responded the lady; "is not that what men are sent into the world for, and what right has he, blessed with youth, health, and talent, to be stand-

ing idle, whilst older and better men are toiling wearily from day to day?"

"He has no profession," suggested the girl.

"Let him choose one, then," replied Miss Caldera, "or rather let him get rid of some of his absurd dandyism and family pride and dreamy anticipations, and settle quietly down at business and become a useful member of society."

"Like uncle John?" added Mina.

"He will never be like any one half so good," remarked Miss Caldera warmly, for she thought Mina's words implied a sneer, which they did not.

Her former charge looked for a minute or two up at the clear blue heavens, then she said in a deprecating tone,

"I do not think I have any pride, or absurdity, or 'notions,' as you call them, and yet I should not like Malcolm to do what he styles, 'put himself into harness' and be buried alive at Wapping, and sit there the whole day leaning over a desk, writing from morning till night, and thinking of nothing but money—money—money—till he grew a regular old city merchant like some of my uncle's friends: I cannot fancy my brother 'a business man.'"

"Indeed!" angrily retorted Miss Caldera; "and pray, my dear, what can you fancy your brother?"

"An officer," replied Mina.

"A nonsense!" exclaimed her friend.

"I don't see why he should not," said his sister; "he is handsome enough, and daring enough, for anything, and my father was in the army, and many of our relations; I really do not see why Malcolm should not be an officer, if he choose."

"Well, I do," answered Miss Caldera; "for he has so provoked your uncle, that I can see plainly he will never buy him a commission."

"Then we must get him one some other way, that is all," replied Mina, so quietly, that Miss Caldera began to think her almost as foolish as her brother, and told her so; at which the girl laughed, and said she believed her friend imagined both of them to be perfect simpletons, but that, indeed, she was mistaken.

"That may be," responded the governess, in a manner, however, which clearly implied the unspoken mental addition of "but I don't believe I am."

Meanwhile, very shortly after her return to London, the old laird's niece received a long letter from Cecilia, so full of "dears" and "loves" and "darlings" and all sorts of fond expressions, that it fairly astounded the recipient, and induced her

almost to believe she must have misunderstood her friend, and felt displeased with her on very slight insufficient grounds.

Cecilia hoped her "pet" would come and be one of her bridesmaids, for she was to be married in the autumn, and though Mr. Malcolm Frazer and she had not parted on the *very* best terms, she hoped he had not quite forgotten her, and desired best and kindest remembrances to him. And she gave an account of her cousin's wedding, and said how *very* lonely Glenfiord seemed after Mina's departure, and filled half a sheet with wishes that they were living close to each other, and asked how she was contriving to exist in that dreadful Belerma Square, and made particular inquiries concerning the state of Mrs. Frazer's health, and said that if Mr. Merapie were going to retire, and thought of purchasing an estate in the Highlands, there was a beautiful property to be sold not a mile from Glenfiord; how delightful it would be if Mina could induce him to buy it; and she wound all up by saying, "Of course my engagement is no secret now. Ever dear, dear Mina, your affectionately attached—CECILIA WARMOND."

Miss Caldera smiled when she finished reading through the epistle her former pupil handed to her

for perusal, and in answer to Mina's question, "Well, what do you think of it?" she said briefly, "Not much;" which reply, undoing the effect the letter had produced, brought the individual who was so happy as to be called by Miss Warmond "friend" back to her preconceived opinion of that young lady, and caused her to doubt if every word traced in that fair, delicate, Italian hand were true, and whether the one half at least of the contents of the epistle did not sound, as Miss Caldera, who never could resist a saw or a proverb, said, "a vast deal too sweet to be altogether wholesome." Also, on Mina's informing her brother of the projected marriage, he curtly rejoined,

"Oh! yes, I knew all about it long ago; she told me she was engaged to Allan after she had drawn me on to propose—hang her!" and, in fact, so much evidence, circumstantial and otherwise, was produced just about this period in Miss Warmond's disfavour, that poor Mina began to be thoroughly convinced she was very far from what she ought to be—very, very far, indeed, from being the sort of person she had fancied that bright spring morning, when she threw her arms around the beautiful neck and said she was so glad, so very glad Cecilia was to become her cousin.

"What is making Mr. Allan Frazer marry such a creature?" demanded Miss Caldera, as she folded up the letter with an air of supreme contempt; "what in the world has possessed him?"

"I am sure I do not know," replied Mina, and it was true, for she felt Allan's love for the General's daughter was nothing remarkable, and she had speculated often concerning what could, as Miss Caldera said, "have possessed him."

But Allan Frazer himself knew, and that was sufficient; he was aware of how he had longed to be free—of a painful interview between himself and his uncle, which terminated with his saying, "Oh! if she would only give me up," a thing she had not the remotest intention of doing, either for him or anybody else.

For, as far as she was capable of loving man or woman, she loved the laird's grandson—loved him for himself, his appearance, his talents, and the sort of celebrity he had acquired; further than all this, she stuck to him because he desired to cast her off, and showed her he did; and, because she fancied he cared for Mina, "that little, insignificant, uneducated child," and she was determined as he had once proposed for her he should marry her, or else she would know the reason why.

"If you have not changed your mind," said Allan, coldly, to her one day, when, at length, some kind of an explanation had become unavoidable, "if you have not changed your mind, or repented your choice, or come to the conclusion that I am not qualified to make you happy,—if, in one word, you wish me to fulfil my engagement, I am ready to do so; if not——"

"You will start for London and resume your interrupted flirtation with Mina Frazer," she added, with an angry laugh.

"With Mina Frazer! heaven forbid!" ejaculated Allan; "no, no; Mina is too good and gentle-hearted to flirt with, and as to marrying, if she ever do commit the folly, I trust the fates will provide her a better husband than I feel I am competent to make any one: no, no," he said again, in a less hurried tone, "I am fond of her as a cousin, as a sister, as a dear, good, truthful little girl; she always rises to my mind like a pure pleasant memory of childhood, or something very close to childhood: never say that again, Cecilia; I cannot bear to have even Mina's name mentioned in connection with that horrid word."

"I spoke thoughtlessly," responded Miss Warmond, who felt she had ventured a little too far on

dangerous ground, "and it was wrong for me so to do, as you were talking seriously concerning a serious subject."

"Our marriage!" acquiesced Allan. "You have now had a long period to reflect upon the matter, and I wish to know if you are still of opinion that I am an individual with whom you could endure to pass years—a life time. I do not desire to hold you bound because of any engagement between us: I have endeavoured not to deceive you in any point, whether relating to my family, circumstances, or self; you have seen everything as it is, had ample opportunities of judging for yourself. I am well aware that I can offer you no home equal to some others, the doors of which would open gladly to receive you; and therefore I ask you to consider yourself as perfectly free, and to decide for the second time, as if it were the first, whether you will take me as I am and my fortunes as they are, or whether we shall part now, never to meet again excepting, perhaps, as friends."

Cecilia knew what this speech meant just as well as the person who uttered it: she knew he was really asking her to set him free, though he worded the sentence as if it were he conceding that boon to her; she read down into the depths of his heart and

saw that his love for her, vehement, wild, romantic as it had been, was gone; she felt he was yearning with a soul-sick longing to be set at liberty; that he was waiting, like a criminal to hear his doom, dreading lest she would accept him. Cecilia knew and saw all these things, and yet, and perhaps because of them, she held him to the contract he had madly rushed into and would not give him up.

There was a burning fury raging in her heart; if she had hated Allan Frazer she would still have forced him to marry her: she resolved to be revenged, even though, in working out that vengeance, she should wound herself; jealousy, anger, resentment, affection, mortified vanity, determined obstinacy, a truly feminine spirit of contradiction, and a lamentable deficiency of womanly feeling and womanly pride, urged her on, and, amidst a torrent of, for once, perfectly genuine tears, she sobbed forth the decision, which it was death to the laird's grandson to hear, "She would marry him."

The fiat had been pronounced that sealed and blasted his destiny for life; like the victim who feels the last plank drawn from beneath his feet; like the child of care, on whose bosom the chill hand of misfortune has just stamped some ineffaceable mark; like the bereaved one who is told of the death of a

friend, loved better than land or gold or station; like the merchant who hears his wealth has vanished and that he is left a beggar, so Allan Frazer listened to her final resolution; and when at length he slowly and gloomily quitted the apartment, it was with that look of fixed despair in his face, which marks so unmistakeably the man who feels his peace is wrecked, his happiness destroyed, his future blighted.

Moore, in one of his songs, tells us how wretched man would be

> "If, when deceived in love,
> He could not fly to hate."

Which may be strictly true, not merely in poetry, but in fact, when the parties who hate are compelled to separate.

But hatred, or even indifference, is a commodity of rather questionable utility to start with in the line matrimonial; so Allan Frazer thought, yet still he did start with nothing beside it, excepting, perhaps, a little contempt and a great deal of anger, as a happy benedict: and he found, as time went on, he was never likely to become a bankrupt, for his stock in trade increased rather than diminished, and when people congratulated him and admired her, the new-made husband turned away sick and dispirited; for

the beauty that had won was impotent to retain, the grace and the accomplishments had grown distasteful to his soul, her soft low voice affected him sadly, as a melody—no matter how sweet it may be—that awakens disagreeable memories palls on the ear of the listener and causes him to desire to fly from the sound of it: where she dwelt was a place to be absent from as much as possible; in one word, the doom of many of his race was upon him, only he had repented sooner than they. The change, he was conscious of before marriage, but that, perhaps, made the sorrow only the greater, for the lady, not desiring the engagement to be cancelled, he had felt himself bound in honour to make her his bride; and thus Cecilia carried her point, as she would have carried any other on which she had once set her mind, even had the same been going up to her neck in Loch Lomond and finishing her earthly experiences there: and if she did not get all she wanted, why Allan got nothing he desired, and that was an immense advantage gained, considerably more than half the battle; it was indeed almost the whole of it, so the General's daughter consoled herself by thinking at times—when the conviction forced itself upon her that both had been worsted in the struggle, that she had paid a high price for

something not particularly well worth having, that, in short, for the sake of loving him a little, it had been scarcely worth while to persist in tying herself, whether he would or no, to a husband who loved her not at all. But whatever she thought about the business signified not; there was nothing now to be done but make the best of it, for they were married. Oh! yes, there could not be the least doubt about that fact; they were married one bright sunshiny morning in the autumn, as Cecilia wrote to her "Dear Mina" was to be the case; and the ceremony proved a very sublime affair indeed, for an Indian commander-in-chief—or, to speak more correctly, a commander-in-chief who had been in India—honoured the nuptials with his presence; and his niece, Lady Matilda Cintra, looked charming, as one of the bridesmaids; and, in brief, so many grandees, gathered from far and near, came in carriages and pairs and carriages and fours, flanked by outriders and surrounded with a sort of halo of liveries and crests and coats of arms and pedigrees, to see one person, at least, made miserable, that the leading Edinburgh paper of that period devoted a paragraph to the affair; and it got stuck somehow in the *Morning Post*, and cards went flying about to the houses of the great and the noble and the wealthy; and John Merapie, who hated hum-

bug, read the passage through from beginning to end, and then told a city friend, who asked if the bridegroom were not a connexion of his, that he believed he was cousin or something of that kind to the children (Mina and Malcolm), and that the bride had wanted his niece to be one of the bridesmaids, but, he was thankful to say, she was too sensible to run mad after folly and fashion and Mechlin veils and lords and ladies and — humbug.

All of which impressing the city friend with a magnificent idea of the grandeur of Mrs. Frazer's Highland relations and of the wealth and sense of her brother—a man who could afford to talk lightly of a commander-in-chief and a Lady Matilda Cintra —he turned over thenceforth a new leaf in his behaviour towards the family in Belerma Square, and found out that Malcolm and Mina had the "stamp of aristocrats about them and no mistake." "Real true blues," he remarked to an acquaintance who had extensive dealings in indigo, and who, therefore, stupid as he generally was, understood that style of praise, and grunted forth an acquiescence thoroughly genuine and sincere, though he did outrage Lindley Murray and mangle Dr. Johnson horribly during the performance.

And that paragraph was perused by many another besides John Merapie and his city friends.

Alfred Westwood learned it off by heart, and then silently cursed some mysterious parties, and communed for hours with himself, after which he took a fixed resolution. Miss Caldera glanced through it and said, she "hoped they'd be happy." Mina skimmed the list of fashionables over the governess's shoulder, and sighed, she knew not why, to find so grand a lady was actually her cousin.

Mrs. Frazer got her son to read all about the wedding aloud for her edification, and though he sneered when he came to the part about the lovely, amiable, and accomplished bride, still the whole thing gratified his Highland pride and snobbish nonsense. The cards so beautifully tied together and inscribed, Mr. Allan Frazer—Mrs. Allan Frazer, to the end that they might be better seen, were taken carefully out of the highly enamelled envelope and placed on the top of the papier maché basket John Merapie's sister had filled with bits of pasteboard collected during previous years, on which were printed the names of grandees, who had forgotten such an individual as herself ever existed.

Well, well, it was a harmless vanity, a reminiscence of more fashionable days, a sort of silent

denial that Belerma Square was a proper place for her to reside in, a mute protest against the injustice of shutting her out for ever from intercourse with "the persons moving in the sphere of life she had formerly been accustomed to."

I once heard a tale of an individual who *stole* a card, having the name of a peeress traced on it, and who, if the story were not a fiction, preserved it among lesser and more ignoble cards till it grew yellow with the action of time, worn with the process of perpetual fingering. Poor Mrs. Frazer did not carry her absurdity so far as this; she merely exhibited to, or rather placed within view of, curious visitors what was *bonâ fide* her own, acquired legitimately in other times; and finally, as if by accident, so disposed the heap, that the last precious *morceaux* the fates were pleased to send her should be seen by everybody at a glance: only did this, and got Malcolm to read her a dreary newspaper paragraph through.

One other person permitted his eyes to wander over that chronicle of the goodly company who went to see Miss Warmond transformed into Mrs. Frazer; and, when he concluded, a darker shade came on Ernest Ivraine's brow, and he sighed as he looked at the swamps of Paradise to find Mina's relatives

appeared to be, not merely rich, but aristocratic; that to the beautiful land of her birth she had so many ties; that Malcolm's assertions regarding their family were quite correct; that his own impressions had been a little wrong. Ernest's hand trembled slightly as he laid down the paper which a sycophantish neighbour sent his father day after day; why it should have done so he knew best; "she was nothing to him—nothing;" he said so constantly, and tried to believe the statement correct.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROAD TO FORTUNE.

Months previously the baronet's son had returned home, looking, as Sir Ernest kindly told him, like a "resuscitated corpse:" and, in truth, his long illness had produced anything rather than a beneficial change in his appearance. His pale face, haggard looks, and emaciated person, completely removed a suspicion his father had entertained, that Ernest, for some unknown purpose, "was shamming;" it was a vast deal clearer than a finger-post that the young man was just recovering from sickness,—long, severe, dangerous; and having satisfied his mind on this point by one keen scrutinising glance, the baronet's thoughts, which constantly turned to gold—"true as the needle to the pole"—reverted to money, and he began to consider what a deal his son's accident must have cost,

and how the fees and medicines and etceteras were to be paid.

"So you have been very ill, you say," was almost the first remark he vouchsafed.

"Yes, sir, nearly dead," responded Ernest, laying an unconscious, but still most mournful, emphasis on the "nearly," as if he regretted an answer could not have been given regarding him without the presence of that word.

The baronet mentally calculated the cost of having his body conveyed from London and buried at Lorton; debited and credited the accounts of life and death, so to speak, and finding the balance decidedly in favour of the former, the expenses of the latter being, at a moderate computation, more than double, he said, in a much more satisfied tone,

"Well, but you 're better now, are not you?"

"A great deal; I am, I may say, quite strong again."

"And so your journey might have been saved; the opinion is——"

"What I wrote you," supplied Ernest, as his father stopped, "that you have not an inch of ground to stand upon. Scott and Smeek took that view from the first; but as they did not like to go by their own judgment alone, they said it would be better to

lay the affair before some eminent barrister, which we did. The very first legal opinion of the day has, therefore, been taken on the question, and the sum and substance of that opinion is, that if you wish to go to law you can, but it will be with a positive certainty of being beaten."

"Humph! that would scarcely suit Sir Ernest Ivraine," said the baronet reflectively.

"So I told Scott, and he said he knew that, and intimated to the barrister you were not accustomed to that sort of thing. The other said shortly, 'He had heard of your having twenty law suits and never losing one; but that if you brought this into court you would get the worst of it.'"

"A straightforward honest speech," remarked the baronet, who was pleased to find his fame, in respect of successful litigation, had spread even to the heart of England's metropolis. "Lawyers are the only class of men I care to have any dealings with; they are up to every kind of villainy, and make no pretence about it; and when they say, 'Don't go to law,' you may depend they are sincere, seeing it is their interest everybody should be at loggerheads with his neighbour. The first 'case' I have, I will retain that fellow, and my opponent shall pay him: ha, ha! Well, Ernest, anything else?"

"Nothing, excepting that, in return for the guineas he received from me, he sent back a 'full opinion' to you, which you can read at your leisure, I having now condensed the matter of it; and further, Mr. Scott called frequently upon me during my illness, or, rather, when I was getting better—not in the way of business, but as a friend—and, before I left, he advised me to urge you by no means to go to law, as it would certainly entail enormous expense and could serve no good purpose, except to give your opponents a triumph over you."

"And he styles that a good purpose," soliloquised the baronet; "well, so be it, only it's one I won't be the means of accomplishing just at present: and he went to see you without wanting to be paid for it, did he?"

"I presume, on account of certain former business transactions with you, he considered it only respectful to call on your son after I had been so unfortunate as to get my arm broken; besides which, Belerma Square is scarcely a stone's throw from his office in Arras Street."

"I wonder," said Sir Ernest with his usual benevolence, "you could not have watched where you were going, and avoided such an accident; I never heard of anything so clumsy or provoking in my life

—stumbling for no other conceivable purpose than to make work for the doctors. Pshaw! I thought you had more sense; the expense of them alone must have been something frightful; set of leeches as they are, they never let a patient out of their hands till they have sucked his pockets dry: I would hang the half of them, and that might be a warning to the remainder of their brethren." And the baronet, who loved lawyers, delivered this sentence with peculiar gusto, and chuckled, in his customary savage manner, at the idea of how summarily he would settle the bills of the numerous and much libelled class, who either prefix Dr. to their surnames or else stick M.D., as an appropriate and ornamental finish to the same.

"I beg to assure you," said Ernest, when the old man, having thought better about suffocating himself, had stopped his detestable laugh before it fairly took away his breath for ever, "I beg to assure you, my expenses for medical attendance were so moderate as quite to surprise me, and you must remember I was at none other."

"None other? ah, yes! I had forgotten: somebody picked you up and carried you home,—a philanthropist was it, or an undertaker anxious to get the job of burying a gentleman, or a lady desirous

for a good matrimonial settlement, who thought if she could bring you round, you might 'do,' eh! Ernest, which was it?"

The blood mounted into the young man's cheeks, and he bit his lip to find it doing so, particularly as the baronet's cold, shrewd, searching eye was upon him; but he answered with an attempt at unconcern,

"I do not think the person who performed the very kind act of rescuing me from the tender mercies of a policeman and an hospital can lay any claim to the character of a philanthropist, or, indeed, would wish to do so; but that certainly is the only one of the three personages you have named he even faintly resembles."

"Don't like philanthropists," remarked the baronet, determined to sift the matter to the very bottom; "glad to hear he does not set up for one, though I admit they are occasionally useful, as in a case of this kind, for instance; but who was your entertainer? open your mouth wide for once, Ernest, and tell me: I am desirous of knowing who saved the life of my son; naturally anxious—you understand," and the wretched, ungrateful old man smiled like a fiend and fastened his glistening eyes on the thin worn face of him who grew alternately red and pale under a scrutiny which was becoming almost unbearable.

"My entertainer was a Mr. John Merapie, of the firm of Merapie and Westwood — rich I should think, kind I know, eccentric I believe—who resides at number 12, Belerma Square, and is reported to be a first-rate man of business and to stand high in the commercial world as a person of strict integrity, and so forth."

"What family has he?" demanded Sir Ernest, as his son paused.

"None: he never was married and seems a confirmed bachelor," was the reply.

"Humph!" This favourite ejaculation of the baronet's was uttered after the fashion of a confidential soliloquy, and his son was just praying he had got to the end of his queries—in other words, he either had never smelt the game at all or else been lured off the scent of it, when suddenly out came the next question, and the one Ernest had been dreading from the commencement.

"What kind of a feminine creature keeps house for him? He does not live all alone in one of those Belerma Square mansions without some female relative, I suppose, eh?" and the miser finished off this interrogatory by stretching forth one hand, as if he would fain have shaken information full and accurate out of his son.

"His sister, or, rather, his half sister, manages the establishment," Ernest responded.

"And what may she be like?" persisted his father; "is she young or old, handsome or plain, rich or poor, a dependant or what? Tell me at once, sir; I—I want to understand this business thoroughly. I always suspect these disinterested people: I am not going to have you inveigled into a vulgar pauper marriage, I——"

"For heaven's sake, sir, don't agitate yourself so unnecessarily!" interposed Ernest, in the calm sarcastic tone he had surely inherited from his parent, for it was one Sir Ernest could assume at pleasure; "the lady is neither young, handsome, nor peculiarly attractive; she may either be a dependant or not for aught I know about her: John Merapie never made the slightest effort to 'catch' her for me, and if you remain without a daughter-in-law till I ask you to receive that gentleman's sister, greatly indebted as I feel myself to both of them, you will live to see the youngest oak on your property a giant tree. Pray set your mind at ease; nobody has spread the net matrimonial for me since I left here; great catch as I admit I would be for the relative of a man who is worth some quarter of a million at any rate."

For about the first time in his life the baronet found himself at fault; there was a quiet scorn in his son's manner that threw him off the trail: it was long before fresh occurrences set him on it again, and caused him to reflect that there might be other ladies living at number 12, Belerma Square, than John Merapie's sister. Ernest's tone satisfied him the young man was not in love with the merchant's relative; and, as he had no particular fault to find with the pair who had saved him from the infliction of a long hotel bill, and no very good pretence for quarrelling with Ernest, and as, moreover, he wanted to inform him he had thought of a way of "doing" Sir Hugh Xifer and the rest, without going to law with them, he contented himself by saying,

"If he have a quarter of a million, he will hardly ask you to marry his sister, I am perfectly satisfied about that; only I like to see my way and not to be blinded: Henry has brought disgrace enough into our family, without your making us any worse; and for what he has done I have renounced him, cut him off from my heart and my home, blotted out his name as child of mine; remember that, sir, never forget it."

"It strikes me you were a little premature with

regard to my brother, just as, a few minutes since, you were too hasty in reference to myself," remarked Ernest, still maintaining the withering tone which alone ever seemed to produce the slightest effect on his parent; "I told you years ago Henry would rise to name and fortune yet, and you then laughed my assertion to scorn; but the boy had the materials in him out of which heroes are moulded; he has risen, as I asserted he would; he has flung back the lie in the teeth of those who would have prejudiced you against him by tales of his rashness, his discontent, his waywardness; he has struggled, he has conquered, he has won; your son is no longer a 'common private, a vagabond soldier.' Without money, without influence, almost without a friend, he has raised himself from the ranks, and now stands in a position in which you will not blush to acknowledge him. To what station he may further attain it is impossible to say; perhaps his name may yet become one famous in history; if life be spared, he will certainly achieve some brilliant destiny for himself: meantime, you will learn from this letter what he has already accomplished; he enclosed it in one to me, and bade me be sure to give it, whether you were willing or not, into the hands of 'his father.'"

These were the concluding words of the longest sentence Ernest had ever uttered in his life; but this time the miser did not inform him he was "becoming eloquent." No; during the progress of the speech he turned pale, livid almost with excitement; his face assumed a totally different expression, his whole frame quivered and trembled, as though shaken by some violent emotion; and when, at last, his son held out the missive, he looked at him, first wildly for a moment, and then clutching it with convulsive eagerness, he bade Ernest, in a voice almost inaudible from emotion, leave him alone —leave him alone quickly.

And when Ernest obeyed, the old man tore open the letter, and devoured rather than read its contents. If Henry's speeches had been of the longest, assuredly his epistle was of the shortest: but what did that signify; "good news," like "good goods," go in small bulk, and thus a few honest manly lines sufficed to tell the struggles, the disappointments, the success of the younger brother; he possessed nothing to give in exchange for a commission, he said, "but his blood," and of that he had not been sparing: his upward course was marked by a deep broad track of crimson, but he had won, at length, name, fame, epaulettes, position; and standing—after

years of toil and struggle, of weary climbing and of sickening disappointments, on the broad sure stone, Success—he wrote, for the first time since they parted, to his parent, and conveyed to him the story of his experiences, his long-deferred hopes and their final realization, in a score or so of concise decided words.

But oh! what volumes did those words not contain: the story of manhood's toil; the exultation of youthful pride; the firm purpose of a noble soul; the unalterable steadiness of a truthful generous heart; the natural triumph of one who, having been misunderstood and traduced, was able to fling the undeniable fact of having carved out his own way to fortune, unassisted, unpatronised, unsullied, in the faces of his former calumniators: there was everything in that short letter, everything—even to a vague instinctive attachment for his miser parent—save love of home.

He desired not to revisit Paradise, that was self-evident; he loathed the very memory of that place, amid the fields and the trees and the swamps of which the old miser baronet sate him down to read and re-read, with a half-proud and a half-angry heart, the history of his disobedient son's wild projects, and their just commenced fulfilment.

"It was in him, in him always, Henry, my brave rash son."

So muttered Sir Ernest, and the letter shook in his hand, and something very like a film came for a moment over his restless grey eyes as the record of step after step—how longed for, how won—swam before him; no one could have believed it was actually the unfeeling old baronet who thus grasped, who thus perused, the letter of a soldier—his gallant boy; he seemed as different as night is from day, as the tempest from sunshine, as storm from calm, as good from evil; but still he was just the same, only the single good chord in his nature having been touched, a sort of harmony—not the less affecting because strange and wild and a little harsh and irregular—pervaded his whole being; he was thinking then, kindly, gently, of the only creature under heaven he loved, after his selfish sordid fashion, well and disinterestedly; and as the words and the looks and the tones of old came stealing into his soul, and with their magic fingers woke the music of that one solitary string which alone ever vibrated at the swell of gentle passions, the miser became, for a brief space, a man, the cynic a father, the sneerer a something capable of experiencing human emotions, and being melted for a moment by them.

There was a wild joy and a strange sorrow in the heart of Ernest Ivraine when he beheld how his parent received the news of Henry's success, when he noted how, for a period after the receipt of that letter, the miser seemed softened, subdued, altered: a mingling of many feelings,—triumph, regret, impatience, anger, grief; boundless exultation at the leap his brother had so unexpectedly made from the dull dark shore, called poverty, to that other, its bright opposite comparative, prosperity. Henry's pride was his pride; he could now, in his name, give back scorn for scorn to those who had dared to question the abilities and the sense of his brother, to measure the exact height at which he should always remain stationary, to point out with sarcastic finger a spot close to the base of the hill of fame where he was ever to stand still, gazing wistfully up to that summit, which it would never be his good fortune to reach; he could now keep them at bay better than formerly; he possessed a hold over the old miser, more potent than flattery, or subservience, or cleverness; the second chance was again restored, and its influence he found to be, not merely unimpaired by the lapse of time and change of circumstances, but strengthened fourfold; it had almost ceased to be a "chance," for their hope of a goodly

inheritance might now, Ernest saw, be called a certainty.

And if the hate he bore some of his kindred made him rejoice their assertions had been proved false, a far better and more christian feeling, the love he felt for his brother, caused every pulse of his heart to beat quicker in fraternal sympathy with the triumphant expressions of the young officer.

The weight was at last lifted from his soul; he no longer lay awake at night, mourning for the generous youth whose spirit had been crushed by disappointments; who, having chosen his lot, was forced to drag out year after year in weary servitude, uncheered by congenial companionship, unillumined by a hope; who had no friend out there or anywhere to help him up; who loved no one and was loved by no one, save Ernest, his silent, melancholy, absent brother.

No; light had dawned in India at length: the night was passed, the morning come, and sometimes when sorrow pressed sorely upon him, when his own chains galled and his own thoughts oppressed him, the elder brother turned his mournful gaze away to the glorious east, to the land of splendid luxury, of pearls and perfumes, of gorgeous flowers and towering mountains, of cactus hedges and impene-

trable forests, of palaces and magnificence; to the land where great destinies have been achieved and valour recognized and diplomacy rewarded; to the land which had become that of promise to the miser's youngest born. From the dreary fens of Lincolnshire he turned his mournful gaze away to the east, and, forgetful of himself for a period, drew comfort and gratification from watching the proud confident strides that were being taken in rapid succession by him who so resembled the fair-haired, gentle woman they both had called, in childhood's first faltering accents, "Mother."

So much for the joy; so far all was as, perhaps, it ought to have been, as pure, as unselfish as human feelings ever are; but a craving, never-sleeping sorrow, which devoured his peace, intervened at this point and prevented his good thoughts obtaining entire mastery over him,—prevented, in one sentence, Ernest Ivraine from rejoicing so fully and completely with him who rejoiced as he would unquestionably have mourned had ill fortune fallen to the lot of the youth, who, having gone forth nobly to breast the stream of fate, had reached, with the help of Him in whom he had put his trust, a safe and happy port at last.

Oh! why in those far back years had Ernest not

been strong in faith, brave in honest self-reliance, too? why had he not ventured out into the strife, that he might now have been free, unfettered, independent? why, when with a sickening heart, a vague repentance oppressing him, he asked himself these questions, did he not, earnest in purpose, hopeful in spirit, leave Paradise behind him, and casting from off his soul the shackles of that which Henry had called "accursed gold," commence, even at the eleventh hour, the struggle of existence?

Because their dispositions, temperaments, and gifts were so different; because the one was rash and the other prudent; because the one was enthusiastic and the other calculating; because Ernest had more patience and Henry more energy; because the former saw no sin in lingering, watching, waiting for a parent's death, while the latter felt, as he said, the guilt of even the idea oppress his soul; because the elder had inherited something of his father's indomitable obstinacy and adhesive persistence; because a little of woman's blind impulsiveness, of her foolish impetuosity, and absurd ideality, had been bequeathed by his dead mother to the younger.

Difference of character! in that brief sentence was contained the key to diversity of conduct; the bold

fearlessness of the one had sent him out on a vague desperate errand into the world; the cold cautiousness of the other kept him hanging on for ever about Paradise, a man toiling and slaving for another's benefit, enduring, hoping, waiting for a chance.

But now when, without his assistance, Henry had climbed so high as to be able to reach down a helping hand to aid him in his ascent, when each Indian letter, as it arrived, came laden with words of affection and promises of assistance if he only would join the writer, when he called all the money he had so long and uselessly hoarded for Henry's benefit his own, and was thus possessed of enough to leave his father's house and take his first step in life's highway—a gentleman, with gold sufficient to buy civility and courtesy from the cringing throng,—when after years of anxious waiting, the end he had longed for seemed far off as ever, why did he hesitate?

Because, though circumstances might have altered he had not: the old temptation was strong as ever to retain, the new lure feeble as formerly to attract; he repented him, it is true, that he had not gone *then*, but he asserted it was too late for him to commence *now*; if his father bequeathed them wealth, he should be better off than any exertions of his own could possibly make him; and if, on the other

hand, he left Paradise and failed—ay, there was the old doubt again—Henry could only give him assistance, not wealth; whilst, by lingering a little longer, taking a fresh stock of patience on board to serve him for a brief space, he should become a rich baronet without a care.

And what if Mina married in the interim? What if, before he was able to go and tell her, with unclouded brow, the history of his secret troubles, of his former reserve, of his affection for the sister of one who had saved his life? What if, before death's kind hand left him at liberty to try whether a woman could be induced to love him as well as Henry had done, she—the only creature, save his mother and Henry, for whom he ever entertained a sincere attachment—should have made new ties for herself and become incapable of being ever aught unto him, save a sad memory and a gentle-hearted friend?

The thought flickered through his brain at intervals, and so surely as it struggled to light, Ernest smothered it with a sentence he tried to believe, but could not, "She is nothing to me, can never be;" and as rapidly as he smothered the reflection in one form, it sprang to life in another, and thus—a vague, indefinite, painful idea,—it remained with and constantly haunted him.

Thus the summer, passed in dim reveries under spreading trees, wore slowly away, and autumn came, —that autumn when Cecilia Warmond was married, and the baronet's son read all about the ceremony in the aristocratic columns of the *Morning Post*.

CHAPTER V.

SIR ERNEST "SCATTERS HIS ENEMIES."

MEANWHILE the select committee had not been idle; the bridge progressed apace, the farmers rejoiced as the affair proceeded rapidly towards completion. Sir Hugh Xifer rode down day after day to note how the workmen were "getting on;" the owners of land in the vicinity had become reconciled to the idea of a most moderate toll, as the "roundabout" seven miles nuisance had really become unbearable. Everybody was satisfied, everybody, even to Sir Ernest Ivraine, only the baronet did not tell the select committee so; no, he held his peace, and they saw their bridge rise quickly to something fit to put a toll on, and were thankful.

There were many, indeed, who whispered "Sir Ernest meant mischief," but the wise men of Lorton laughed the assertion to scorn.

"He would like to do us mischief, we have no

doubt," they said, "but we defy him legally to carry out his wishes, and if he attempt to carry them out illegally, we 'have him;' but he is too wise by far for that."

Yes, Sir Ernest Ivraine was too wise for that, particularly as he knew he "had them." He neither summoned them for trespass nor served them with notice not to build on his premises, nor bribed "parties" to undermine the foundations, nor ordered out a select band to pull down the toll gate; he did not threaten, or rage, or trouble himself apparently in the slightest degree about the matter; he expressed, indeed, perfect indifference on the subject when it was named in his presence, and was altogether so externally careless, that he contrived to deceive his old enemy, Sir Hugh, and the remainder of the select committee most completely; he lulled them into a state of the most placid contentment and unbounded confidence, induced them to believe he was vanquished; in fine, he was so clever as to let them build away in peace and make them think they had triumphed over him so completely, that he had ceased to talk of opposition or of annoyance.

There was a look, however, in the baronet's face which Mr. Medill distrusted, a sort of half-suppressed malicious expression, that puzzled the

worthy attorney; he could not, indeed, tell exactly what plot the old miser was hatching, but he felt convinced there was something disagreeable in the wind, else Sir Ernest would never be taking the matter so quietly and making so little noise about it.

"I fear," remarked Mr. Medill to Sir Hugh, "the weather is too calm at Paradise; we shall certainly have a storm before long, blowing due north from that quarter."

"Nay; rather," returned the knight, "remember the inverse of the proverb you were thinking of, 'after a storm comes a lull.' We had high winds and high words and thunder threats some months since: I am sure it is not to be marvelled at there should be a little peace now, after the tempest he raised last winter."

"But that tempest did no harm; it was fierce, it is true, but it was also open: this time he is brewing some precious mess in that impenetrable cauldron of a brain of his; and I know, by the sarcastic twinkle of his eye and a peculiar curl, or rather twist, of his lip, that he is not merely bent on crossing your plans, but has found out some way of effecting his design."

"I defy him," said Sir Hugh solemnly.

"Do you defy the devil?" demanded the attorney.

"And all his imps," answered the other; "he has no law on his side: the road is ours; we repair the bridge at our private cost, and every individual who has any influence in the matter, excepting, perhaps, himself, has agreed that our proposal of a nominal toll is only just and equitable. He dare not damage the building, he cannot pass over the bridge without paying; he could only remove the gate by using illegal force; in short, I defy him to outwit us now in any way which would not overstep the bounds of law and render him liable to an action. I have looked at the matter from every point of view, and I see nothing that he can do to annoy us or benefit himself."

"Well, you may depend he does," briefly responded Mr. Medill.

"Do not believe it," said the knight, shaking his wise head in a sceptical manner; "I feel sure we have got the better of Sir Ernest Ivraine for once."

"Never knew any man yet who was so fortunate," was the reply. "Other people swear and bluster quite as much, perhaps, but they stop sometimes: now there is *no end* to Sir Ernest; he never lets go his hold; he never lifts his nose from the

scent till he has hunted his game down; he never turned aside from any purpose in his life: if he cannot do harm one way, he will in another; he never forgets, he never forgives. Take my advice and have a care; I know there is danger near at hand, for the owner of Paradise is never so dangerous as when apparently perfectly tranquil."

But Sir Hugh laughed the injunction to scorn; and he laughed still more confidently when the bridge was finished, when carts passed over, and their drivers paid tolls, and the temporary plank affair was removed altogether, and the other opened and presented to the public, renewed, strengthened, beautified, as a route for regular traffic.

Still the lull remained unbroken at Paradise: it is true Sir Ernest had been heard to remark he would pay toll one day on the bridge, but never again; it was also noticed that not a single one of his tenants had been seen to pass over it, and somebody asserted that a fresh "opinion" had been taken on some mysterious subject connected with the bridge affair; but the committee pursued the even tenor of their self-sufficient course, perfectly satisfied that they were so excessively clever, nobody could, by any stretch of human ingenuity, manage to outwit them.

The structure, however, had not been a "perfect miracle of art" for more than three days, ere the worn-out old pensioner, whom Sir Hugh and his brethren—he being fit for nothing else—had hired "cheap" to do their "dirty work," as the ungrateful farmers now styled the task of collecting their pennies, came hobbling up to Lorton Hall, and craved an interview with its owner, Sir Hugh Xifer.

"I am afraid, sir," he began, "there is something astir up there," and he jerked his head in the direction of Paradise, "so I made free to come and tell you so, and to say I think it might be well to keep a sentinel or two about the place for a few nights."

"Confound your sentinel," said Sir Hugh, savagely; "we are, and have been, at sufficient expense already; he *dare* not do us any injury; he will never put himself within the clutch of the law; I only wish he would, hang him, but he won't, I know he won't."

"Well, sir," re-commenced the old man, who had "stood at ease" during the rapid delivery of the above speech, "when I served under the Duke I learned two things; the first was to report all I saw to my superiors, the next, to obey their commands implicitly; so I will, first, if you please, tell you

what happened this afternoon, and then leave you to order what you think best to be done."

"Make haste, then," growled Sir Hugh, who listened only with one ear to the pensioner's harangue, the other being amply engaged hearkening for the sound of the dinner bell; "make haste, then," and, accordingly, thus graciously permitted to proceed, the man began:

"About half-past three, sir, I was leaning over the side wall, looking at the river, and thinking how quiet and sluggish it seemed, and of how it could brawl at times, when who should I see coming to have a glance at the work but Sir Ernest Ivraine—he, and a friend with him, and they did take a precious stare at it to be sure."

"I hope they admired it," remarked the knight.

"I don't know about that, sir; but they walked over and over and round and round it, and down on to the bank, and stood for more than fifteen minutes staring at the supports and buttresses, or whatever they call them; and then they came up again and leant over the parapet, and talked like pickpockets together for ever so long: and, at last, when they passed me on their way home, I saw the baronet was laughing in that strange fashion of his, not out loud, but in to himself—quietly in his throat; and,

when they had got twenty yards or so from the bridge, again I saw them stop and look back, and I heard the gentleman, whoever he was, laughing, till the very arches rung, as they walked away to Paradise."

"Is that all?" demanded Sir Hugh.

"Yes, sir, that is all," answered the man, "and plenty too, I think," he added, *sotto voce.*

"Sir Ernest Ivraine dare not tamper with that bridge," remarked the knight, who really felt more uneasy than he cared to confess; "we won't begin with watchmen, or any other useless expense; but it is quite right for you to notice everything, and let me hear it, quite: however, I am sure we have nothing to fear in that way; you may rest perfectly easy; if he could have given us any trouble, he would have done so long ago:" and, as the dinner-bell rung at this juncture, Sir Hugh summarily dismissed the pensioner, and repaired to that meal with what appetite the rather disagreeable intelligence just received had left him.

"Medill was right," he muttered, "there is mischief brewing; I wonder when death will try a tussle with the old fellow. I am sure it could not be too soon for the peace of the shire." And Sir Hugh spent the remainder of that evening in grum-

bling about his neighbour, wishing savage and unchristian things concerning him, and hoping all sorts of evil might shortly happen to him: for the society about Lorton was none of the most select; manners were of rather a common standard, and refinement at the lowest ebb: the knight was much coarser in demeanour and rougher in speech than the baronet; but still he was rich enough to head and lead on a band of insurgents, whose pride Sir Ernest had wounded by his taunts, his contemptuous sneers, and his unanswerable sarcasms; and thus war for ever raged betwixt the owners of Paradise and Lorton Hall, thus it was that Sir Hugh defied Sir Ernest, and that the baronet declared, with a diabolical grin, he "had" the knight at last.

For there were times and circumstances in and under which the miser never scrupled to expend money to effect a purpose; and, having once vowed that the Lincolnshire sages should have, as he styled it, "to knock under," he rested neither by day nor night till he discovered a plan likely to meet his views, and disconcert theirs: and, that he might be enabled to carry it completely into action, and know exactly on what ground he was standing, he first got an "opinion" as to whether the committee, having opened the bridge as a public thoroughfare

for general traffic, had the power to refuse any toll; and, finding such was not the case, he got a friend of his, an engineer, to come and inspect the masonry, and give an idea of how many tons weight it would require to injure it: then he had a vehicle purposely constructed, tested, and found suitable, procured horses *ad libitum*, and at length announced himself ready.

"Come, Ernest," he said, "and see the fellows settled;" so Ernest walked down by his side to the scene of action, and witnessed the final result of his parent's long concerted experiment.

The men in charge of the enormous load soon came in sight, and the old pensioner, who had closed the gate, in anticipation of a passage being forced, was agreeably surprised to find the toll instantly paid without a word of remonstrance or irritation.

As the horses dragged countless tons over the bridge, a slight cracking, however, was heard, which filled the soul of the old pensioner with dreadful alarm.

"The general in black uniform must have dealings with you," he thought, scowling at the baronet; "but, thank heaven! it is safe over at last."

"Turn," called out Sir Ernest, as he had just

muttered the last words; and, with some difficulty, the horses' heads were turned, and again the bridge was passed, but this time it bent perceptibly.

"Turn," was again the baronet's order; "here, fellow, take your toll," he added, holding out the proper amount. "What, in the name of all the fiends, are you doing, closing the gate in the face of my servants! Open it at once, sirrah, or I 'll make an example of you."

"You are set to break down the bridge," answered the man, assuming a defiant attitude—a stiff military position.

"And what business is it of yours what I do?" returned Sir Ernest; you are here to receive tolls, not to obstruct traffic: open the gate, I say, and let the horses pass."

"I won't," responded the man, doggedly. "I understand perfectly what you are up to, but I know something too——and——"

"You absolutely refuse to open that gate?" said the baronet.

"I do," was the reply.

"Though the proper toll be offered to you?"

"Though fifty tolls be offered to me."

"And you persist in obstructing the passage of my carts and horses?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, the consequences be on your own head," finished off the baronet; "you are only making trouble for yourself and your employers. Put rests under the shafts and keep the horses quiet," he added, addressing the men, "till I can obtain legal assistance to enable me to cross a bridge on a public road."

"Run and tell Sir Hugh Xifer that Sir Ernest Ivraine is going to break down the bridge by law," whispered the pensioner to a boy who stood near him; "run like the wind, and say I want to know what I'm to do; make haste and I will give you a penny," which remarkable piece of liberality produced such rapidity of movement in the youth, that before five minutes had elapsed he was standing in the presence of the worthy knight, gasping forth the frightful legal intention which had taken unexpected possession of his neighbour and enemy, the miser baronet.

"Hang him!" exclaimed Sir Hugh, who could have adjusted the rope himself and swung the adversary with pleasure; "hang him! Here, boy, run off to the other gentlemen and tell them, and if you can find Mr. Medill, bring him down to the place too, and there's a shilling for you," and the

owner of Lorton Hall absolutely flung the lad the coin he had mentioned, and then hurried off to the point of action, the much-canvassed, greatly-endangered, long-menaced bridge.

"Good morning, Sir Hugh," said the baronet, nodding superciliously to him, whilst Ernest, who wished himself at the antipodes rather than where he was, vouchsafed a more gracious inclination.

"You are come, I presume, to make straight a matter your servant has chosen to put crooked," continued the miser, with a diabolical grin; "he declines to receive toll or to permit my horses to pass: may I inquire whether or not he is acting under your orders?"

"How the deuce could he be acting under my orders, when I was not here to give him any?" vociferated the knight, whose flushed face and excited manner afforded a striking contrast to the cool sardonic self-possession of his opponent, who, long and pale and thin, and apparently unconcerned, stood leaning against one of the pillars of the bridge, listening carelessly to Sir Hugh's answer.

"Then am I to understand," he said, "that this person has no instructions to close the gate?"

"I never instructed him anything about the matter," growled forth Sir Hugh, who, in a face-to-

face encounter with the baronet, found himself nc match for the owner of Paradise.

"If he have acted without orders and without in· structions, I conclude you disapprove of his conduc and have come to make reparation for it," said Si Ernest.

No verbal answer was vouchsafed to this speech but a puzzled scowl and an eager straining lool along the road leading to Lorton, implied, as th baronet knew, volumes.

"This delay has been and is a serious inconveni ence to me," he resumed; "if you wish me to be lieve your servant is really the party in fault, an not merely an instrument in your hands, pleas express your desire that no further annoyance b given to me or my people."

The Knight of Lorton Hall looked wistfully a the load, then at the bridge, then at Sir Erne Ivraine, finally along the road.

"If you let them 'ere blocks of granite over on time more all will go down together," ventured th pensioner, who thought he read indecision in hi employer's face.

"Silence, fellow!" bellowed Sir Hugh, as h noted the sneer which curled his opponent's lip and thus "put down," the gate-keeper—by far th

honestest man of the trio — relapsed into silence, still, however, sticking as resolutely to his post as if it had been the key to some strong position in the Peninsula, unexpectedly menaced by the French.

"Do you know, Sir Hugh, you are acting very foolishly?" recommenced the miser; "it is nothing to me, or at least merely involves a few minutes' delay till I procure legal assistance, but it may be much to you: as a friend, therefore, I counsel you not to lend your countenance to such a business."

Sir Hugh merely bit his lip, by way of rejoinder, and glanced back, for the twentieth time, to see whether help and counsel were coming; as he beheld, however, a solitary figure advancing, he inwardly muttered a fervent "Thank Heaven!" and fresh spirit and fresh hope revived within him, when Mr. Medill, the very man he most desired at that moment to see, drew near to the spot, and inquired, in a cool, quiet tone, what was the matter.

"He wants to break down the bridge," spluttered forth Sir Hugh.

"Good morning, Medill," said the baronet in quite a friendly manner, extending one long finger to the attorney; "rather a stand still here, you perceive: I have offered this fellow the proper toll, and it has been refused. Your client won't cross

his servant's whim, so I am just waiting till proper authority arrives to enable me to get a load of stone along a public thoroughfare. Then I can insist on the gate being opened: meanwhile it is rather idle work standing here; fine morning, though, is not it?"

What response the attorney would have made to this explanatory speech can never now be known, for just as he opened his lips to reply, Sir Hugh, who—feeling himself re-inforced, so to speak—could keep silence no longer, burst forth with the question,

"Pray, Sir Ernest Ivraine, is it your desire to break down that bridge?"

"It is my desire that my men and my horses and my property should cross that bridge," replied the other.

"That you may demolish the work of months in a few minutes."

"That is your idea of the matter," said the baronet.

"And a correct idea, is it not?" retorted Sir Hugh.

"That you can discover for yourself," replied the miser; "Sir Hugh Xifer's remarkable powers of mind and rapidity of conception are so well known,

it would be worse than superfluous for me to attempt enlightening him."

The person to whom this polite speech was addressed absolutely gnashed his teeth with rage; he longed to strike his opponent with the riding whip he carried, but a wholesome fear of the consequences restrained him: there was no use getting into an outrageous passion with a man who only became more cool as he became more excited. Sir Ernest would not quarrel—he knew that by experience; and therefore, after a moment's hesitation, he turned to Mr. Medill and demanded,

"Has he a right to demand leave for that pyramid to cross?"

"Clear," was the brief response.

"And if we persist in keeping the gate shut——"

"He can force you to open it."

"Quite correct, my dear sir, else I had never been here," remarked the baronet.

"Stand aside, then," roared out the knight to his *employé*, "let them pass and be——"

The holy finale to this brief sentence was lost in the noise which had ensued on a sign from Sir Ernest to his men, who commenced forthwith shouting to their horses and striving to get the animals to start.

"They 'll all go in together," groaned out the pensioner.

"Let them," said Sir Ernest with the utmost *sang froid*, and he crossed his arms on his chest and watched — triumph gleaming from his eyes — the countenance of Sir Hugh, who heard the bridge crack and bend under the enormous weight it required almost a regiment of horses to drag over it.

"I have a right to come back now without paying any toll," remarked the baronet drily, and once again the horses' heads were turned.

"That will be the fourth time," said the gatekeeper.

"Will you hold your peace, sirrah!" exclaimed Sir Hugh, who vented his spleen on him in default of being able to expend it on the original cause of irritation.

"May I beg that you will order your drivers to stop for a moment?" interposed Mr. Medill, addressing the baronet; "I see the remaining proprietors coming, and it would be a pity for more damage to be done before they arrive: perhaps you and they could settle the matter amicably."

"Amicably with him!" said Sir Hugh Xifer, who was fairly distracted; "amicably with——"

"Oh! you might have finished your speech aloud," laughed Sir Ernest; "the devil, you know, listens to terms occasionally."

"You know that," retorted the knight; "for, if all we have heard be true, there is a sort of compact between you and——"

"Don't excite yourself unnecessarily," interposed the other; "here come your friends, they will relieve you from the trouble of conversing with me."

And, as he spoke, the three other individuals, who, with the owner of Lorton Hall, composed the select committee, arrived, filled with vague alarms, in consequence of assurances they had received from the lips of the boy who had been despatched to summon them, that "Sir Ernest Ivraine had sent for a body of police, and was breaking down the bridge by law."

Mr. Medill, being the only disinterested party present, explained the state of the case to them, during which explanation the baronet stood with his hands buried in the pockets of his threadbare trousers, listening with the most perfect unconcern to the recital. When Mr. Medill concluded, however, he added, by way of a "settler,"

"To condense all into one brief sentence, gentle-

men, I have the power, if I pay the proper toll, to cross and recross that bridge till eternity, or rather, as there is little hope of the structure lasting so long, till it break down."

Here was a "fix;" the proprietors looked at one another, then the stupidest of them inquired,

"How often Sir Ernest wanted to draw the load over?"

"As often as I please," was the response; "and now, as I have delayed a considerable time to the end that you might have an opportunity of personally admiring the strength of the pile of masonry that owes its existence to your enterprising spirit, I must beg that you will stand a little to one side and let my men pass."

"For Heaven's sake, stop!" vociferated the trio with one breath; "what is it you want us to do? only tell us."

"To keep out of the way, that you may not be knocked down and trampled to death," answered the baronet.

"But will you listen to no terms, agree to no conditions?" they demanded.

"Ah! now you begin to talk like sensible men," remarked Sir Ernest; "offer me reasonable terms, and you won't find me difficult to deal with; be

stiff, and, if it prove in the power of granite to do it, I 'll set your bridge swimming."

"I 'd let it swim or sink or stay," said Sir Hugh Xifer, "before I 'd offer you terms or agree to any you proposed."

"Yes, but you are only one out of four," replied the baronet; "a very important unit, I admit, but still only an unit."

"I wish——" began his neighbour.

"I know you do; but what is the good of it? Meantime, your friends are wishing to speak, and you prevent their doing so. Now, gentlemen, if you please," and Sir Ernest made a patronizing sign for the crest-fallen landowners to commence.

"We can't propose terms, as we don't know what ground we are going on: we want to hear what you want."

"A clear sentence, concisely constructed," sneered the baronet: "let me see; you can't propose terms, you have no idea of what ground you are upon, and you want to hear what I want. Well, the latter part seems all I have to do with, and, as I cannot —not having been blessed by nature with the talents of my friend, your colleague—answer such an important question in a moment, I propose, first, a sort of truce between us; and, second, that you send

some accredited agent — say Mr. Medill, for instance—to Paradise any time before twelve o'clock to-morrow morning, to hear my decision. If he and I come to terms, well and good; if not, well and good, still: meanwhile, I undertake that my carters do not cross the bridge during some fixed period, say the next four-and-twenty hours; and I shall take means to prevent any injury being done to my property in the interim. Really the air is chilly to-day," added the baronet, assuming an erect position: "Shall we settle the matter that way, then, gentlemen, for the present?" he continued, after an instant's pause; and, having received a doleful affirmative from the lips of all concerned, save Sir Hugh Xifer and his *employé*, he first addressed a few words to one of the carters, and then walked off towards Paradise, accompanied by Ernest.

For a full hour the committee remained on the bridge, canvassing, contradicting, grumbling; but there was no use in it: Sir Ernest Ivraine had laid his plans well; there was no getting out of his net; no cheating or deceiving or "putting off" him; and the end of it all was, that when Mr. Medill was despatched to Paradise, he was empowered to accede to any terms the baronet might propose "in reason."

"As if," growled out Sir Hugh, "anything he expects could be in reason."

"They have put me to a deal of expense," said the person thus spoken of, "a great deal, and given me an incredible amount of annoyance; but I don't want to be hard with them or impose any disagreeable conditions, solely because I am master now: no; these are the terms I propose, from which I will not abate one iota; and if they do not like them, we need treat no further, that is all."

And the end of the business was, that Sir Ernest extorted from the proprietors a paper, exempting him and every individual who called him "landlord," or who should, at any future period, become a tenant of his, from the payment of any toll or tolls whatsoever, by whomsoever demanded, on a certain bridge, built across, etc., etc., flowing through, and so forth.

And, moreover, he made them give him a sum sufficient to repay every shilling he had laid out since the commencement of the affair; and, while Sir Hugh Xifer first swore till he was almost black in the face, and then grew so furious that a doctor had to be sent for to save him from a fit of apoplexy, his enemy, whose power he had defied, remarked, with a quiet smile to his son, pointing

at the same time to a cheque for a very respectable amount,

"That settles the cost of your visit to London, Ernest, at any rate."

CHAPTER VI.

A DREAM OF YOUTH.

One August afternoon, about a month after Mina's return from the Highlands, and before Allan Frazer had been, as the hacknied phrase runs, "made completely happy," John Merapie's niece asked Miss Caldera if she should have any objection to go out with her.

"Not the least," was the response; and, accordingly, out they went together, Mina piloting their way up streets and down streets and across squares and through all sorts of strange places with an expertness and "knowledge of her business," which would have struck the worthy Laird of Craigmaver as something rather remarkable.

"Why did you never ask me where I was going?'" she demanded at length, after they had walked a considerable distance in silence.

"Because I know, my dear, you can occasionally give a short answer," was the reply.

"Just because of that ill-natured one of yours, then, I won't tell you," said Mina, colouring even while she laughed, for the little thrust, like all Miss Caldera ever attempted, went home; and—perhaps rather glad of the excuse than otherwise—she spoke not another word on the subject till she finally paused before a door, graced by a dingy brass plate, intimating to the world in general, and to authors with money in their pockets, in particular, that on the other side of it lay the publishing office of the Messrs. Hannade.

It might have cost any one, excepting Mina Frazer, a smile to behold the contortion Miss Caldera pulled when her former charge halted in front of the above-mentioned inscription; but the only visible effects it produced upon that young lady were to heighten her colour considerably, and to induce a rather irritable inquiry of,

"Will you come in?"

"I may as well see the play out," said Miss Caldera, resignedly.

Mina made no reply, but turning the handle, entered without ceremony and without fear—(as is the fashion of young aspirants, who, never having

gone through the ordeal of a rejection, entertain little dread of a repulse)—a dreary-looking place, so strewed with books and papers, that somehow it gave Mina the idea of being painted, furnished, and carpeted with manuscripts.

There was no one in the office when they first glanced around it; but almost immediately after an individual of the shortest stature, with fiery red hair, brushed angrily back from his forehead, and a quick, shrewd, intelligent, though not intellectual, expression of countenance, emerged from an inner chamber, and advanced to learn what business might have brought two ladies from the fates knew where, and set them down on the much worn matting covering the floor the fates, not he, knew how.

It was palpable to the most unobservant that he must have been engaged in the not very literary or romantic, though occasionally necessary, operation of washing his hands, for the cuffs of his coat and the wristbands of his shirt being turned back, in a suspicious manner, implied the fact, whilst a very coarse towel, with which he was industriously drying his fingers, confirmed it.

He appeared, however, not in the least degree concerned at having been detected in this employment, but coolly continuing it, looked first at the

elder lady, and then at the younger, not speaking, but calmly awaiting information.

Mina glanced appealingly towards her friend, but Miss Caldera remained impracticable. It was her principle to let "everybody talk for himself;" and as, moreover, Mina had never asked her to interpose in her behalf, she resolved to permit her emancipated pupil to say what she chose as she chose.

"Is Mr. Hannade in?" stammered the girl at last, feeling some one ought to say something, and that her companion would not, "is Mr. Hannade in?"

"My name is Hannade," responded that gentleman, in a rapid manner; indeed, he talked so fast that his words tripped over each other in their passage from tongue to lips, the result of which was that the listener came quite as soon into possession of the last syllable as the first; and, having intimated the fact, he shut up his mouth again and looked at Mina to see what impression the intelligence produced upon her.

"I wished to speak to you about a book," she said.

"Pray be seated," answered the publisher, and down went a pile of papers on the floor, after which performance Mr. Hannade graciously presented his visitors with—chairs.

A long pause ensued, the only noticeable thing during which was, that whilst he appeared to be waiting for Mina to speak, and keeping an attentive ear open to catch any word of wisdom which might fall from her lips, he fastened his eyes on Miss Caldera, and never once removed them from her face, as though he were endeavouring to discover from its expression whether her companion, the young Miss in her teens, were a hoax, crazy, or jesting.

"Do you ever read manuscripts?" was the question with which Mina ventured, after some deliberation, to break the ice.

"It is what we are here for," tumbled out Mr. Hannade, with a facetious grin.

"Would you then read one of mine?" asked the girl, a smile on Miss Caldera's lips having rendered her quite desperate.

"We are rather overstocked at present," he said, cautiously; and, in rather a slower tone, "you desire to publish on your own account?" this last was interrogatively.

"I do not precisely understand," observed Mina.

"You wish to retain the copyright and pay the expenses," he explained.

"No," said the would-be authoress, "I want you

to do that," which reply brought a less agreeable expression over Mr. Hannade's face and caused Miss Caldera to smile again.

"We are rather overstocked at present," repeated Mr. Hannade, in a tone sufficient to have annihilated the hopes of a much more confident individual than Mina Frazer.

It was the first time in her life she had ever been refused anything by a stranger; it was the first check that had met her in this absurd literary attempt, and absurd though it assuredly was, it did not strike her as being such. She made a violent effort to appear unconcerned, but it would not do: a deep burning flush came up into her cheek and a tear persisted in dimming her eye; and when, after an instant's hesitation, she arose to go, there was a look of such mortification in her face as moved the pity of the governess, even while she tried to convince herself, "the conceited child deserved a regular 'setting down' for her presumption."

Now, spite of the war-like style in which he arranged his hair, and the dry, shortness of his address, and the excessive rapidity of his speech, Mr. Hannade was really a kind-hearted man; though he was a publisher, he was still a mortal, and he did not like to send anything of the feminine

description out of his office almost crying: no doubt he would have acted more prudently and kindly in the end, had he permitted Mina to depart and take her manuscript with her; but the sorrowful look in her dark soft eyes, and a certain tremor about the mouth, fairly conquered his previous determination, "not to be tormented with her," and he, therefore, let in a gleam of sunshine upon the previous darkness of his address, by inquiring on what subject the work in question was written.

"It is a novel, sir," answered Mina brightening up so suddenly, that Mr. Hannade felt he had "fairly committed himself."

"I knew that, well enough," he thought; then added aloud, "So I presume, but what kind of a novel?"

"I cannot tell——" Mina began.

"I mean, what sort of a novel: is it a religious one or——"

A violent fit of coughing from Miss Caldera caused the remainder of the sentence to be strangled in Mr. Hannade's throat; but, after a moment, he resumed, a just perceptible smile lingering around the corners of his mouth, "Or historical, perhaps, or sentimental, eh?" and the publisher insinu-

ated this last idea in a well-pleased tone, as if the right nail had been finally struck on the head by him.

"No," answered Mina in all seriousness, "it is not exactly any of the three; it is more, I think, what would be called, a moral novel."

"A what?" gasped out Mr. Hannade.

"A moral novel," she repeated, blushing to her very forehead; "that is, I mean it is about people trying to do right and be good, and there is some religion in it too, and——but perhaps you would be so good as to read it, and then you would know better what is in it."

And the girl stretched out the manuscript so entreatingly that Mr. Hannade felt himself constrained to take it from her and promise to "look over it," even whilst he shrunk with horror from the idea of fulfilling that promise, and made a sort of composition of one page in the hundred with his conscience, which whispered he ought not to tantalize and deceive his visitor by accepting the imposing looking parcel, with the intention merely of laying it carefully aside till she called for it again. Yes, yes, he would "look at it."

Oh! if young authors could only be made to understand the precise meaning publishers attach to those

three words, how many an hour of weary sickening suspense, how many a bitter disappointment, how many a dispiriting miserable walk they might save themselves! How many a high vision that brief sentence has conjured up; how many an air-castle has been built on the strength of it, raw youths fresh from college and women just cast adrift on the world's wide ocean, who have unadvisedly flown to the pen as to a means of fame and wealth, could tell: they turn from the publisher's door as Mina Frazer did, fancying the rubicon is past, the battle won, the prize gained; and they come back to have all their lovely edifices levelled in the dust, to be recalled from dreams of countless sovereigns to the horrible actuality of scanty shillings, to be sent out despairing as they had entered triumphant by the three other words, which sound the knell of the rejected manuscript, "does not suit."

Mina Frazer, however, in common with many another aspirant after literary reputation, had never been favoured with a peep into the brief convenient dictionary publishers have compiled for their own especial behoof, relief, and benefit; and imagining, as most young scribblers do, that if she could only get her book read, it was certain to be accepted, Mr. Hannade's tardy "I will look over it," appeared

to her merely next door neighbour and intimate friend to "I will take it."

"I am greatly obliged," she said, in a tone so polite it might have astounded Malcolm, though it did not surprise Miss Caldera.

"If you knew all, you need not be," thought the publisher with a sort of compunctious twinge, holding the door open for his visitors to pass out, and wishing most fervently they had never come in; but he merely smiled and bowed in actual reply.

"When shall I call to know?" vaguely demanded Mina on the threshold.

"Oh! give me a few days," answered Mr. Hannade; then noticing Miss Caldera's quick glance settling on him, he turned a little red and added, "let me see, I fear I can scarcely promise to read it under a fortnight, we are so very busy," and he looked hopelessly at the papers around, as Mina thought, in utter despair. "Could I write to you?" he added; "I should be very happy to do so."

"I don't doubt that in the least," half murmured Miss Caldera; but her charge settled his hopes of escape through the medium of the post by hastily replying,

"No, thank you, I will call again in about a fortnight; I need not give you the trouble of writing."

"It would be no trouble," said Mr. Hannade: "rather a pleasure," he added, after he had returned Mina's good evening and Miss Caldera's stiff bow and seen them fairly "off the premises." "Rather a pleasure: I wish I had let her go at the first, it would have saved me an immense deal of subsequent annoyance, but it is no use wishing now. Bless my heart, what a bundle! and such a title, and a moral novel, of all things under the sun, written so carefully: well, I promised to look at it, and I will." And Mr. Hannade, leaning with folded arms upon his desk, skimmed the first page, read a few lines of the fifty-seventh, glanced again at the hundredth, and, after making one rapid jump to the end of all, found himself master of the contents of the entire manuscript; at least he had seen enough of the contents to know, "it would not suit."

"Won't do," he soliloquised, tying it up again in a meditative manner, "won't do, and she won't do; but how I am to tell her that, I don't know: no good her starting in that line at all: she has not the gift as they call it; only if she 'd publish herself, that would be no great concern of mine if she wished to test the experiment. If she only had it back now: but still it is a fortnight a-head, and

perhaps she may get some new ideas in the meantime." Having concluded which speech, complimentary to Mina's talents, and really creditable to his own rapid powers of discrimination, he thrust the parcel into a box filled with others in a similar predicament, and, on the old principle of "out of sight out of mind," forgot all about Mina Frazer and Mina Frazer's "effort."

Totally unconscious, however, of the very summary manner in which her darling child had been tried, condemned—or, to speak more properly, left in a sort of literary morgue, to be claimed—Mr. Merapie's niece walked along the London streets by her friend's side, waiting eagerly for the latter to speak, longing, yet still not liking, to open the conversation herself. Miss Caldera, however, maintained a resolute silence, until at length, as they were crossing one of the most crowded of the many crowded thoroughfares, she chanced to meet Mina's eye fastened so intently upon her, that she found it impossible to repress a smile.

There was something about that smile which annoyed the girl so much, that, forgetting all her good resolutions, all her affection for her friend, all she had thought about her when in Scotland, all about the omnibuses and carts and cabs and vans

and broughams, she came to a dead halt right in the middle of the crossing, and demanded in an extremely angry manner, what Miss Caldera was laughing at?

"You, my dear," returned that lady, as she dragged her from under the nose of a carriage horse, and so over the broom of an Irish 'sweeper' to the side path and safety; "if you do not wish to form the subject of an interesting newspaper paragraph, I should advise you never again to halt right in the centre of a London street; you were very nearly knocked down that time."

"Well, suppose I had been?" said Mina, sulkily.

"And if not killed, been crippled or invalided for life, perhaps!" added the governess; "how should you have liked a finish of that kind?"

"Not at all," was Mina's frank confession; "but, you see, you provoked me just then."

"As I very often do," retorted Miss Caldera; "as it is not a very difficult business to effect: but still I do not see why you should endanger your life every time you get out of temper."

"I do not get out of temper so very often," pleaded the girl, who felt she had been both irritable and ungrateful; "and, indeed, I try not to be cross, but you know I cannot endure to be laughed

at, particularly when I am in earnest about anything: and I am very much in earnest about beginning to write and make money, and——"

"Make folly," interposed Miss Caldera; "have you not everything you want, everything money can procure? What new mania is it that has set you scribbling now? I declare, Mina, I thought you had more sense."

"Well, don't be angry without a reason, dear, cross old friend," said the young lady, "and I 'll tell you all about it, and how the idea of writing occurred to me; only, remember, you are to keep it a great secret, and not to speak about the matter to anybody."

"I have too much regard for you to do anything of the kind," retorted the governess.

"You see," continued Mina, without noticing this friendly remark, "my cousin Allan is very, very clever, and he has published a great deal, and——"

"You thought the talent ran in the family," interrupted Miss Caldera.

"I thought nothing of the kind," responded Mina; "and, if you keep catching me up so every minute, I will stop talking altogether. I had been wishing for months and months to have money, you understand, *of my own*, to do what I liked with:

but it never once crossed my mind I could by possibility make any myself, till one day, at Glenfiord, Cecilia said, when we were all out on the lake together—I knew she was making fun of me, but that did not matter—

"'I do so wish, Mina, you would begin to write a book, I am sure it would be unique; I would pay all expenses just for the pleasure of getting a peep at it:' then she turned to Allan, and added, "could not she write a book, don't you think?'

"'Anybody could do that,' he answered, in the stiff brief way he has trained himself occasionally to speak in, 'anybody could do that; but Mina is quite clever enough to write a book worth reading, though I hope she will never be so foolish as to make the endeavour.'"

"Your cousin Allan is a simpleton," broke in Miss Caldera; "as if you were not conceited and puffed up enough with flattery before, he must commence complimenting, to see if it were possible to make you vainer, and more absurd than you had become without his assistance."

"Indeed, you are mistaken," said Mina; "Allan has, I admit, changed into rather a fashionable man, but still he never complimented me."

"Oh! you thought it all truth, I have no doubt," replied her friend.

"And whenever," resumed the girl, without heeding this remark, "he heard Cecilia Warmond praising me, even in the most simple things, he seemed vexed and irritated."

"I don't care what he did, or what he did not do," persisted Miss Caldera; "if it be he who set you on this ridiculous writing scheme, he has a great sin to answer for, that is all."

"But he did not; it was Cecilia who spoke at first, he merely answered her. Well, I thought and I thought after that whether I could not make out a book some way, and at last I resolved to try; and, whenever I came home I did try, and I have managed to finish one, and you know the rest."

"Yes, I know plenty," grumbled Miss Caldera; "and pray what do you propose to do now you have 'made out a book?'"

"I propose—always supposing I can get enough sold—to buy Malcolm a commission, and then work very hard till I grow very rich indeed; then some time, many years hence, when Malcolm is a great man, and has retired from the army, he and I will club together and buy a fine place in the Highlands and have carriages for mamma, and Uncle John will

come and stay with us, and you shall give up that horrid teaching and have everything in the world you want, and we shall all be as happy, oh! as happy, dear old friend, as kings and queens."

Miss Caldera fairly faced about and stared at Mina, who, with flushed face and beaming eye had uttered the above rapid sentence.

Having satisfied herself that she had not suddenly been deprived of whatever small amount of sense might formerly have belonged to her, she became completely bewildered which course out of three to adopt; whether to cry over the simple nonsensical vision Mina had so speedily conjured up, in which the comfort of her quaint governess had not been forgotten,—to reason with her on the worse than folly of such wild day dreams,—or to laugh at her excessive absurdity: ridicule being, as she well knew, the only weapon capable of making any permanent wound, she resolved to use it and let matters take their course.

"And have you informed Malcolm of your benevolent intentions concerning him?" she demanded, after a short pause.

"No," said Mina, "I thought it would be so delightful a surprise."

"Decidedly, when it comes to pass," acquiesced

Miss Caldera, laying an ominous emphasis on the three last words; "and you have no fear of success?"

"Mr. Hannade said he would look it over," was Mina's reply.

"Yes, to please a foolish girl whom he knew had no more genius than I have; to get rid of you without a crying scene, in short, my dear, as men, you know, have a horror of hysterics: and, when you go back, he will tell you he is extremely sorry that 'it does not suit;' that the public are tired of moral novels; that historical, or religious, or sentimental, or, to speak plainer English, every kind but that you happen to have tried, are those which go down at present; that he is greatly obliged by your favouring him with a perusal; in brief, he will tell you everything under the sun but—truth."

"Well, we shall see," said Mina, in a rather crestfallen tone; "but I do not think," she added, "it is kind of you to snub me as you are doing, particularly when it was you who first made me reflect about our being dependants, and the possibility of our having, at some time or other, to maintain ourselves; I do not think it kind of you."

"When I reminded you that business was uncertain, affection quite as much so, that changes

came into all houses, and affliction into most, I said also distinctly that the reason I asked you to reflect on these things was, to induce you to consider well before you rejected a comfortable settlement, for no conceivable motive that I was ever able to divine. I never recommended you to turn milliner, or governess, or amanuensis, or scribbler, or adopt any other absurd expedient for making a few pounds per annum; if you are not satisfied with your present position, and desire to assist Malcolm to become an officer, why do you not marry Mr. Westwood? He would do anything in the world you asked him, even to buying your brother the right to wear a scarlet uniform. I should advise you to think of it."

"Should you!" retorted Mina; "well, I won't: I am determined to assist Malcolm myself by my own exertions, by my own labour."

"Just try the experiment," said Miss Caldera, "you will soon tire; I have only two other things to say to you before we part for to-day: I know not one woman out of a thousand can effect anything, and I seriously recommend you to marry Mr. Westwood."

"And I say," replied Mina, "that one woman will effect much, and that I will not marry Mr.

Westwood;" and having given her head a decided nod as she concluded this sentence, the girl bade her friend good-bye, with her hopes a little shaken, perhaps, but her resolution never, under any circumstances, to marry from prudential motives, as she fondly fancied, more immoveable than ever.

CHAPTER VII.

CRUMBS OF COMFORT.

TIME jogged, after a somewhat dreary fashion, through the rooms and up and down the staircases of number 12, Belerma Square, for about the space of two calendar months from the conclusion of my last chapter; he brought no commission to Malcolm Frazer, no money to his sister, no greatly improved health to that young lady's mother, nor cheerful expression to John Merapie's face. Excepting, perhaps, that Mina had learned a little experience, had just sipped of the cup of disappointment, and acquired a vague disagreeable idea of its taste, had made the acquaintance in a very slight degree of that "hope deferred," which the wise man assures us "maketh the heart sick,"—excepting these very trivial changes, things had remained *in statu quo* (to use for once a very hacknied, very much imposed upon, very pedantic sounding Latin phrase,

which happens to express my meaning better than any English one ready to my pen at present), for the period above-mentioned, when one evening some slight variety was afforded by the most unexpected advent of Mr. Ernest Ivraine, who "having come to London to discharge a series of Indian commissions, could not resist the temptation of calling, at a rather unseasonable hour, to see Mr. Merapie."

John Merapie had been, for a considerable number of months previously, in that state of mind which, though it induces most other mortals to desire solitude and to detest company, makes the Londoners hail the society of any one as a perfect God-send; add to this the fact of his liking Ernest, both for himself and his position, and you have, surely, reasons enough to account for his grasping the young man's hand in cordial friendship, and inviting him not merely to stay and dine in Belerma Square, but also to make number 12 his abiding place during the remainder of his sojourn in London.

But Ernest Ivraine could not, or would not, avail himself of the last clause in Mr. Merapie's hospitable speech; he remained to dinner, however, and called once or twice afterwards and accepted a second invitation to come and take John Merapie "as he

was," such being the worthy merchant's favourite style of expression; and everybody in the house was glad to see him, for his manners were mild, quiet, and gentleman-like; and the whole household was so bored to death with its own society, that, though the baronet's son was by no means the most cheerful guest in the world, he was still a vast deal better than many, and infinitely preferable to none.

Mina never forgot that evening; it was the last landmark she beheld before plunging into a boiling, bubbling ocean, blackened by poverty, clouded with sorrow, beset with danger: she stood, or fancied she stood, then on firm ground, and before she well knew what had occurred, she found herself battling, struggling, suffocating in a perfect sea of doubts, difficulties, and calamities.

What a cheerful pleasant circle they formed round the fire, talking about foreign lands and books of travel and strange adventures,—of the topics which, though now forgotten, were then the engrossing "news of the day." How the hours sped by, how loath Ernest was to rise and depart, feeling, as he did so, he was leaving much he cared for behind him; how gladly he availed himself of John Merapie's invitation to come and breakfast there the next

morning before setting out on his long journey home; how pretty Mina looked, he thought, as he bade her good night; how pale and abstracted his host seemed at times, he remembered afterwards: time brought that evening and took it away again. "That pleasure is past for ever," thought Ernest, as he silently wended his way back to his hotel, murmuring sundry discontented observations concerning the old enemy's various rates of progress in London and at Paradise.

Paradise! how, as fancy recalled the memory of the bright blaze he had left, and of the faces—one especially—on which it shone, he sickened at the name of that place, and loathed the galling chain which drew him back to it! And as slumber with him was the rarity, wakefulness the rule, he lay through weary hours, counting the chimes as they solemnly pealed forth their warning sound in the deaf-adder-like ears of millions,—counting the chimes and thinking of himself and his home, and of her and her home.

"What a happy home it must be," he reflected, a haven of rest, a heaven upon earth, a luxurious palace in comparison with the place where he resided. "Oh! that I could shape my destiny and hers as I would," he exclaimed, half aloud, "that I

had never seen her, or else died ere I learned to know I loved her."

And thus care kept guard beside his pillow; but at length sleep laid a gentle hand on his eyes, and brought, with that touch, oblivion, peace, repose; and though care never left its post, but stood there, alert and watchful, ready to pounce upon its victim the instant he awoke, still, during that temporary respite, sorrow and pain vanished; and in the dreams of night Ernest Ivraine was at liberty to fancy himself free and unfettered, able to grasp happiness, competent to feel pleasure, to defy grief; to forget, for a brief period, that the curse of gold was upon him, that he had wasted the best years of existence in almost total inaction, waiting and sinfully longing for the death of a man who, though a miser, was still his father, and who, after his waiting and watching and bearing, could, at any moment, cast him off or leave him a beggar.

Sleep brought, as it occasionally does, forgetfulness of his actual position to the wearied spirit of the baronet's first-born; but with morning's dawn recollection awoke also: what a bitter thing that waking, morning after morning, to the consciousness of disappointment, the necessity of endurance, the need for patience, the repentance of errors, the

perception of follies, the importance of exertion, always proves! Oh! who that might sleep on, after he has once eaten of the tree of knowledge, and learned a little of life's weary teachings, would, if the choice were given to him, desire to open his eyes on earth's vanities again? Who, having the option granted of quitting the trouble and the care and the vexation and the turmoil, would voluntarily plunge for the second time into the dangerous whirlpool, the maddening vortex, the uncertain strife? Who would not thankfully choose to be at rest, to slumber peacefully for ever?

So, at least, thought Ernest Ivraine; but then he was not peculiarly well adapted to decide on the question, seeing that he had started in life on a wrong principle; that he might have made a better use of it—turned it to a far more profitable end; that he was living for himself alone; that he had refused to go forth and work and labour like a responsible being; that he would not employ whatever talents had been given to him to shape out some happier destiny for himself, to benefit others, to make a more endurable thing of existence: he was no fair judge, nor is any one who permits his faculties to sleep, though his body is awake; he had decided wrongly years before, and he was now commencing

to pay the full penalty of that great desire for wealth, to be won by no merits or exertion of his own, which had prevented his leaving Paradise years previously, which compelled him to return to it even then.

Even then! yes, he meant to go home again that very day, after he had breakfasted, according to invitation, in Belerma Square, and said good-bye to the friends who dwelt there.

Mrs. Frazer, Malcolm, and Mina welcomed him when he entered the dining-room; he had never seen the latter look so bright and happy before; new life seemed to have been infused into her; there was a flush in her cheek and an elasticity in her step and a change in her usually quiet manner that puzzled him not a little: but if he had heard a brief dialogue which passed between her and Mr. Merapie on the preceding night, he would have understood all perfectly.

"Mina," said that gentleman to her immediately after Ernest's departure, "I want to speak to you;" and, accordingly, Mrs. Frazer having gone off yawning to bed, and Malcolm having ascended to a special sanctum of his in the third floor, where he retired to smoke cigars when his uncle—who detested the "lazy practice," as he termed a habit which in-

volves certainly more exertion than not smoking at all—chanced to be at home,—Mina sat quietly down in the drawing-room to hear what her uncle had to say in peace and quietness.

"You are no longer a child," began Mr. Merapie, in a blank straightforward manner, which defied contradiction, as did also the fact stated. "I do not know that I ever thought about the matter till the other day, when Mr. Westwood pointed it out to me."

He paused, as if a little embarrassed; but Mina resolutely maintained silence: she knew what was coming, but she thought her uncle might explain it himself without her assistance.

"You know, Mina," he began again at last, "I can never make long speeches, and I am not much accustomed to talk or think about such matters, only I promised to speak to you on the subject; to cut all short, he—Mr. Westwood—wants to marry you."

"Yes, sir," said she, looking very steadily at the fire.

"Well," resumed John Merapie, wonderfully fortified by this most unsentimental comment on his information; "well, what I want to know now is, do you want to marry him?"

"No, I don't," she replied, most emphatically.

"Oh!" exclaimed John Merapie, and he cogitated over her answer for a few minutes; then, remembering he had promised Mr. Westwood to use his influence, he continued,

"It might be well for you to think about this offer, Mina, notwithstanding; you see, a love match is a very foolish thing, never ends well; it is a sort of taking for the look, not for the reality; it always disappoints. Now, I know most girls have a great many absurd ideas on the subject of matrimony, but I fancy you have not; and, though Alfred Westwood is a little too old, yet still he would be very fond of you, and he is a good sort of fellow, uncommonly clever, with a clear head for business, and he is tolerably well off, and indeed, Mina, the more I reflect about it, the more sure I feel you could not do better."

"Well, but uncle, I do not want to do any better, or to marry any one. I am quite content as I am; quite satisfied with my present home; far fonder of you than I could ever be of fifty Mr. Westwood's. I am so well, I do not wish to be better; I do not see why I should think of marrying at all."

"Faith, neither do I," exclaimed Mr. Merapie, "and that's just what I told him."

"Did you?" said Mina; "oh! thank you for it."

"The truth is," returned Mr. Merapie, "I never did entertain a very high opinion of this eternal marrying and giving in marriage which is going on in the world: matrimony never seemed to me so extraordinarily desirable a consummation as it is deemed by most people. I always considered it a great risk to undertake running in harness with a comparative stranger for life—till death," added the merchant, in a strange tone; "and so I told Westwood, that, though I had no objection to the match, and should, in fact, rather like it than otherwise, still that I would leave you to decide as you chose, unbiassed by any expressed wishes of mine."

"I am sure," suggested Mina very softly, "you would never compel me to marry——"

"Compel!" echoed Mr. Merapie, "God forbid; I have always considered that the greatest sin a parent or guardian can commit; and, as you say, I do not see why you should think of wedding at all. If girls are left penniless and orphans and so forth, I suppose it is better for them to marry than turn governesses and one thing or another of that kind: I don't know, but I suppose it is. When they are certain, however, always of a competence, the case is entirely different, and I will take care you are amply provided for, I will never leave you de-

pendent, my dear good little girl, rely upon that."

There was something so earnest and tender in the tone of his voice, so sorrowful an expression stole over his face as he spoke, that Mina, feeling she had never half appreciated the solid goodness of his character, never been sufficiently grateful for all the kindness he had shown her since childhood, arose from the seat she occupied and, taking possession of a low stool at his feet, placed her small soft hand lovingly in his, and answered,

"You have been so nearly a father to me ever since I lost my own, you have made this place so much like home, that I should be a monster to wish to leave either it or you. There was indeed a time—I may well blush to own it—when, spite of all your kindness, your generosity, your ready compliance with every wish, I did so long for the land of my birth, that nothing here completely satisfied me; but I see things so differently now: I have learnt so much latterly, that I am twice as happy now as ever I was, and doubly grateful to you for having provided such a home for us when an unexpected misfortune deprived us of our own. I cannot say all I feel and have felt for a good while past," she added, with a sort of tremor in her voice; "but

though I cannot talk much of all we owe you, I can think a great deal and remember it always."

It was the first time in his life John Merapie ever recollected hearing such a sentence addressed to him by true faltering lips, and it melted the worthy merchant so much, that, moved by some strong impulse, he bent suddenly down and kissed his niece, who flung her arms round his neck and began to weep, as was her absurd fashion when her heart was either touched with joy or moved by kindness.

"What a foolish child you are," said John Merapie at last; "I have done nothing for you but what was my imperative duty, not so much as I ought; I might have made this home a little gayer for you, if I had thought of it,—yes, and I will do it."

"I do not wish it to be different," sobbed Mina; "I am quite happy, quite: I have not a single wish on earth," she paused, and then added, somewhat reluctantly, "but one."

"And what may that be?" demanded her uncle, but she remained silent. "Will money gratify it?" he asked.

"It might," she said: "I 'll tell you what it is, uncle, if you won't be angry."

"Angry! no, indeed; go on."

"I wish so much, then, poor dear Malcolm had a

commission; he has set his heart on being an officer, and indeed, indeed, I know, if you gave him a chance now, he would be very, very steady; he has told me he would, often: he knows he did wrong before; but he was quite young, uncle, and he felt so ashamed of himself and was so sorry about all the money he spent, that he could not ask you to get him into the army. I hope you will not be displeased. That is the only wish I have, uncle."

Her uncle had fixed his eyes very moodily on the fire when she commenced this speech, and, at its conclusion, he said, rising,

"Malcolm has disappointed me grievously, Mina, and I do not think he is at all improved, or likely to improve; I cannot tell what I ought to do with him, but still I will think about it and see: meanwhile, with regard to yourself, you do not wish to marry Mr. Westwood?"

"No, indeed, uncle, I do not."

"Well, then, you shall not," he answered, and rose to retire for the night.

Before he had quite reached the door, however, he turned back a step, and, taking Mina's hand—she wondered at the time what made him do it, and she remembered the action long, long afterwards—he squeezed it very tight in his, then said,

"God bless you!" twice over, in a strange, troubled, yet still earnest sort of way, after which he went hurriedly out of the room, looking very pale and haggard.

And Mina sat down by the dying embers and cried very much; why, she scarcely knew, excepting that she had been greatly flurried and agitated, and was now immensely relieved and rejoiced. But when she arose next morning, not a tear dimmed her eyes or a trace of one was visible on her cheek, for she felt sure Malcolm would now have another chance given him; and she was delighted to think she had "done with" Mr. Westwood for ever. Her uncle had removed a load from her heart: Miss Caldera was quite astray—Malcolm and she would always be provided for. There was nothing wrong with the business, no reason to fear any reverse: they would always be independent; Mr. Merapie had said so: and thus it was only natural that she should trip down stairs with a much lighter step than usual and greet Mr. Ernest Ivraine in such a remarkable cheerful manner, that the miser's son found himself marvelling what extraordinary piece of good fortune had befallen his host's niece, which caused her to seem so altogether changed a being from what he had ever fancied her before.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SUDDEN BLOW.

"MALCOLM," said Mrs. Frazer to her son, a few minutes after Mr. Ivraine's arrival, "I wish you would see what is keeping your uncle; tell him breakfast is ready."

"Mina," cried Malcolm, one of the laziest of mortals, unless he were engaged in some occupation he cared for, "run up stairs like a good child and deliver your mama's message; be quick now, and do not get into any mischief by the way;" and having thus shifted the trouble on to his sister's shoulders, he drew his chair a little closer to the fire and, commenting on the coldness of the morning, began to stir the already blazing coals into a brighter glow, talking and jesting in his usual careless style as he did so.

He had just uttered some pleasantry, when, in the middle of the laugh which followed it, the door

was flung suddenly open, and, making but one bound to where he was seated, Mina, as if the sound of his merriment maddened her, laid her hand over his mouth and uttered the single word "stop," in a tone which rung in Ernest's Ivraine's ears for months afterwards.

"What is the matter?" demanded her brother, looking in blank amazement in her horror-stricken face; "have you seen a ghost? speak, can't you?"

"I—I 've seen a corpse," she gasped out, cowering down on the hearthrug and burying her face in her hands, as though to shut out some horrible sight; "he is dead!"

With a simultaneous exclamation of horror, Malcolm and Ernest rushed out of the apartment and up the staircase together. The door of an outer chamber, which Mr. Merapie had used half as dressing-room, half as library, was wide open, and, hurrying in, they beheld John Merapie sitting behind a small writing-table, his head falling back over the top of an old-fashioned chair, his eyes staring, his features fixed, rigid, cold, in death.

To have seen Malcolm Frazer's demeanour, one would have imagined he had lost his senses; he moaned and raved and tore his hair, and finally betaking himself to the bell-pull, he commenced

ringing with such violence as speedily brought the few servants the house contained to the spot.

"What is it you want?" Ernest Ivraine kept demanding, whilst he busied himself endeavouring to discover whether any spark of life still remained, "what is it you want?"

"A doctor, send for a doctor, go for a doctor!" Malcolm almost screamed out at last; and though he saw it was perfectly hopeless, Ernest Ivraine did speed forth on his dreary errand, and returned in five minutes' time, dragging little Dr. Richards with him.

"Been gone for hours," were the first words the brusque man of medicine spoke when he glanced at the stiffened countenance; "past human aid long ago, long ago; poor Merapie!" and the doctor's voice softened as he murmured the concluding words. "It 's of no use doing anything," he added, in answer to Malcolm's wild entreaty for him to bleed, to blister, to restore heat, to try some vague means for bringing back the dead to life, not to lose time, but if he could suggest nothing to send for further help at once."

"What you desire is impossible," said Dr. Richards in a much gentler manner than usual; "all the physicians in England, all the skill and medicine in

the world, could not make his pulse beat even once again."

But still Malcolm implored so earnestly that means might be employed, that Mr. Ivraine whispered in the doctor's ear, "It is useless, I see, but do humour him, he is almost crazy."

"Never minded a syllable his uncle spoke when living, but goes frantic about him now he is dead," growled out the doctor; then, addressing Malcolm, he continued, "I tell you, young man, we can only treat breathing bodies, not inanimate corpses; but if it will be any satisfaction to you, go quietly down stairs, leave me in peace, and I promise that, if mortal power can be of any avail, I will do my very best."

"And I will assist you," cried Malcolm; and as, spite of all persuasion and entreaty and command, he would not leave the room, Ernest stole away from the dreary apartment to see how it fared with Mina.

She had never changed her position since the first; Mrs. Frazer was in a swoon, and women were ministering to her, but Mina, as though turned into stone, still remained in the attitude into which she had fallen at the beginning: they had spoken to her, but she never answered; striven to move her, but in vain; there she was, just as when he left her,

half kneeling, half sitting, before the fire, her face hidden from observation, neither weeping, moaning, nor sobbing; she was shivering and trembling, that was all.

"Miss Frazer," said Ernest; but she gave no answer: then he strove to arouse her by a gentle touch, laid on her shoulder; but finding all his efforts as ineffectual as those of the women had been, he stooped down, and by means of some slight violence, at last succeeded in withdrawing her hands from her face.

Such a look! the dark terrified eyes never met his, but gazed afar off, as if fastened on some horrible spectacle, from which she found it impossible to avert them. Every vestige of natural colour had fled from her face; it was not white or red, but almost black; her lips were parted, and the chattering teeth, and quick unequal breathing, showed the shock she had received—the fright she was even then experiencing. Ernest was glad to release her hands again, and let her head drop upon them once more; but nothing could obliterate the recollection of that fixed expression of horror from his mind: it haunted him in dreams in after years.

"Doctor," he said to his old acquaintance, after Malcolm had been dragged from the death chamber

and Mrs. Frazer carried to her own apartment, where the man of medicine had first drowned her in hartshorn and sal volatile, to rescue her from a fainting fit, and then dosed her with opiates to avert a series of hysterics, or, rather, to lessen their violence, "doctor, there is a poor sufferer here, needing your assistance as much, or more than any one; I can do nothing with her, will you try?" and he led him into the room where Mina—still crouching down on the floor—sat silent, asking no sympathy, speaking no sentence, making no sign.

"Mina!" exclaimed Dr. Richards, who had entertained a sort of regard for her since she was a child, "Mina!"

Finding no response came, he pulled her hands away with a not unkindly jerk; then, raising her drooping head by the simple contrivance of placing his forefinger under her chin, he was met by the same look which had frozen Ernest's heart within him.

"This must not go on," said Dr. Richards, decidedly; "crying is bad, and fainting too, and screaming, and hysterics worse, but of all evil methods of taking sorrow I like this least, it does far the most harm in the long run: Mina!" he added, speaking to her in a louder, and, as Ernest

thought, unnecessarily harsh tone, "you must answer me some questions; rise up now, it is necessary for you to do so: now, attend to me; I want to know exactly what you saw when you went to call your uncle to breakfast?"

He had by this time managed to get her placed in a large arm-chair, and he stood before her, striving to attract and retain her attention; but still that look he so disliked remained on her face, and her teeth continued chattering, while she seemed totally unconscious or unmindful of anything which was passing around her.

"You must speak!" exclaimed Dr. Richards, in an angry determined tone, that appeared to affect every quivering nerve, and cause it to vibrate with acute pain.

Ernest, who had gone to work far more gently, felt as if Dr. Richards were devoid of common humanity; but the desired result had been at length produced. The eyes wavered for an instant in their steady stare, and making an almost convulsive effort, she asked, a sort of spasm or suffocating sensation apparently impeding her powers of utterance,

"What is it, what do you want?"

"I want to know," replied the doctor, speaking in a still louder key,—never for one instant relaxing

hold of his victim's hands, and grasping them with greater force the more she shrunk from him, "I want to know what you saw in your uncle's room this morning?"

The old look came over her countenance again, and she struggled for an instant so violently, that she managed to release one hand from her tormentor; but Dr. Richards caught it again, and held her by the wrists in such a vice-like gripe, that the mere bodily pain seemed at length to exercise a beneficial influence over the wandering faculties of her mind.

"I saw—I saw," she gasped, every muscle in her face working, till Ernest really began to fear the doctor would throw her into a fit,—"him, sitting with his head leaning on the table; and then——"

"Go on," insisted he, as she paused and shuddered, "go on, and then——"

"Then I went up to him and spoke."

"Well," persisted the doctor, wringing the words out of her, "you spoke, and what did he answer?"

"Answer!" she echoed, and the trembling and chattering recommenced worse than before; "answer!"

"Yes, answer!" he repeated. "Come make

haste now, I have not time to wait here all day; get on, what did he answer?"

"Nothing," she almost panted out, "nothing."

"What did you do?" he further demanded.

"Then I lifted his head and looked in his face—and—and—I saw he was dead!"

"There, she will do now," said Dr. Richards, as a sudden burst of tears succeeded the conclusion of her short story: then, discarding the harsh commanding tone he had hitherto used, he commenced addressing all sorts of soothing expressions to her, giving her whatever scraps of comfort came most readily to hand, striving to console and pacify her with such genuine kindness and almost womanly gentleness, that Mr. Ivraine, looking gravely on, confessed he had done the little doctor grievous injustice, and never, until that moment, fully understood how tender and feeling a heart may beat under the roughest and most unpromising exterior.

Having succeeded in calming her in some degree, Dr. Richards walked over to the sideboard, and, pouring out a glass of wine, presented the same—after he had insidiously dropped something out of a small phial into it—to his patient, and bade her swallow the mixture.

"Now," he said, "sit perfectly still where you

are till I return," and, drawing down the blinds, he beckoned Ernest to follow his example and left the apartment. "That," he remarked as he coolly turned the key in the wards and then deposited it in his pocket, "that will keep her quiet for some hours, at any rate; and now, my dear sir, what is the next thing to be done?"

Mr. Ivraine did not know, but he went in search of Malcolm, whom he found pacing up and down the drawing room, rather more composed than when he had left him about an hour previously, but scarcely arrived, even then, at a state which might properly have been called sane.

"Mr. Frazer," began Ernest, "is there anything I can do for you? Do you think I could be of the slightest assistance in this emergency? If it is in my power to prove of the least use, I hope you will allow me to be so; but if not, I feel I ought no longer to intrude."

"Oh! for pity's sake," broke in Malcolm, "do not leave me; there is not a person in England I care to speak to but yourself: I don't know what to do, or where to turn, or how to manage, and—and —for Heaven's sake don't leave me here alone, with a corpse lying in the house and not a soul to exchange a syllable with but a lot of helpless women."

"I shall certainly not go; but if you wish me to remain," replied Ernest in a soothing tone, "sit down for a little while and do try to compose yourself: you must recollect how much has suddenly devolved upon you,—the entire care and comfort of your mother and sister and the whole management of your uncle's affairs. A heavy responsibility now rests upon you, and you ought to prepare yourself to meet it with a man's heart and a man's quiet unmoved steadiness: you are a boy no longer; you have solemn duties to discharge; you have, as you say, helpless women depending upon you as their only male prop. You must prove yourself a strong one; sit down and calm yourself, and then we will look the worst steadily in the face and see what has actually happened, and what, under the circumstances, is best to be done. Dr. Richards has promised to return in a couple of hours, and we can then consult with him who, having known you and yours for years, takes a deep interest in all that concerns you."

"That fellow Westwood," here broke in Malcolm, who had listened to the above exhortation without heeding a single syllable of it, "has been prowling about the house all the morning; I wonder what business he has here, or who sent for him, or who wants him: I wish to heavens we could turn

him out. Ivraine, could you not give him a civil hint that if he would go, it would be an immense relief? I 'd feel for ever obliged if you just would rescue me from him. I came here solely to be out of his way; he is the most impudent——"

"Mr. Frazer," interposed Alfred Westwood at this juncture, pushing open the door, which Ernest had left slightly ajar, and cutting right across the flattering remark his late partner's nephew was just commencing, "Mr. Frazer, will you excuse me, as a friend, asking you an apparently very impertinent question?"

"I suppose it makes very little difference whether I will or not, as you are sure to ask it at any rate," replied Malcolm sulkily.

"I must ask it," returned Mr. Westwood; "still I trust, though I am aware my words must sound very unfeeling at such a time, that you will not be offended. Has your uncle left any will?"

"What business is that of yours?" demanded Malcolm, his whole countenance flushed with anger; "how the devil can it concern you, whether he has or not?"

Mr. Westwood shuddered, as if the sound of the young Scotchman's hasty oath appalled his refined religious ears; but getting, with wonderful rapidity,

over the horror with which he desired it to be thought it had inspired him, he answered,

"It concerns *me* not in the least, Mr. Malcolm Frazer, I admit; but you may yet discover it a matter of some importance to you and to some others, after whose interests you are now most certainly bound to look with an eye of watchful affection: you, however, dislike to hear truth from the lips of a friend; I will, therefore, relieve you of my presence." And Mr. Westwood, a half-triumphant, half-insulting expression on his face, turned, as he concluded, to leave the room.

"Stop!" cried Malcolm, a vague dread of some unknown evil flashing through his mind and bringing him 'to his senses,'—"stop!" and he flung himself between his late uncle's partner and the door. "Now, sir," he continued, folding his arms resolutely across his chest and using a quick decided tone, "now, sir, I see by your face, I judge by your words, that you are aware of some circumstance or circumstances of which I am at present in ignorance, but of which I ought to be informed; and, as you have thought fit to come here without invitation, you shall stay here on compulsion till you explain your meaning clearly and satisfactorily."

A smile of contempt and malice curled Mr. West-

wood's lip, and, for a moment, Mr. Ivraine imagined he had some intention of swinging Malcolm from his position and clearing a passage for himself; but, if he ever harboured such an idea, it was instantly abandoned, for he answered without even a trace of irritation and, as the looker-on thought, with the most wonderful temper and forbearance.

"I came here as a friend, and you received me as an enemy; now, when I propose going, you insist that I shall remain, but I am willing to make every allowance on account of your youth, inexperience, and the trying situation in which you are placed; and, as I really wish to be of service to you if I can, I overlook the insulting style of your address, and, merely remembering that you desire information, reply, that I am here ready and willing to answer any questions you may think proper to put, always supposing they are of such a nature as that good and not harm can result from responding to them."

"I detest long sentences, sir," was Malcolm's polite rejoinder to Mr. Westwood's temperate speech.

"I really think you are acting foolishly, Mr. Frazer," interposed Ernest, over whom a shadowy alarm had begun to steal, "I really think you are."

"And I know he is," returned Mr. Westwood; "but that is no affair of mine: my motto is, 'let

everybody take care of himself, and manage his own business as best suits his own fancy.'"

"I wish you'd carry your theory into practice," exclaimed Malcolm pettishly; "but, whether foolish or wise, I want to put an end to this interview, therefore suppose we proceed at once to the matter in hand. Why, therefore, do you assert that the fact of my uncle not having left a will can be an affair of importance to me and mine?"

"Because," replied Mr. Westwood, "a few strokes of the pen have sufficed, in some instances, to make a man independent for life, while the absence of two or three words has reduced many individuals to beggary and want."

"But, in our case, a will is unnecessary; an unfavourable one might have unmade us, it is true; the want of one altogether merely leaves us in possession of what my uncle always intended should be ours."

"Perhaps so," said Mr. Westwood.

"Why, don't you know," burst forth Malcolm, "that we are his nearest relatives, that the next of kin always succeeds to property in the event of an intestacy, that nothing *but* a will could deprive us of it? Are you not lawyer enough to understand this, or," he added, a sudden suspicion occurring to him,

"do *you* know of any will? By Heavens! if you have worked upon him to disinherit us, if you have been scheming and plotting against either me or my sister, if you have dared to meddle in family concerns, or got my uncle to leave you anything to our prejudice, I swear you shall never enter into possession of the property, never live to spend a single shilling of the money so iniquitously acquired."

Ernest Ivraine never could tell, at least not until long years afterwards, why this scene affected him with a sort of deadly sickness, that faint sinking of the heart, which is induced, not by bodily illness, but by mental excitement: he felt as if he, too, had an interest in the matter; as if he, too, had a right to interfere; as if he were one of the parties concerned—likely to be benefited, or possibly to be wronged: it was a sort of acting by others of what might come to himself; it was a kind of rehearsal of something, in which hereafter he was to be a principal character—a prominent figure; he had felt at the first that loathing of hearing pecuniary matters discussed in a house shadowed by the wings of the mighty angel, Death, which the sensitive or the uninterested always experience, when the mercenary and the grasping introduce the theme of probable legacies, and wrangle concerning their

various chances, in a room next to that desolate apartment tenanted by the corpse of one who has done with earth, and the curse thereof—gold—for ever. But Malcolm's words had touched the vibrating chord in his heart; the demon was at length roused; the legacy hunter—the man who had voluntarily doomed himself to a hateful slavery, to the end that he might keep all other claimants at bay—all other vultures off the spoil—felt himself sympathising with Malcolm, and anxious for his prosperity, desiring to hear more, wishful for accurate information, doubtful of Mr. Westwood, fearful of the event; and, accordingly, before he well knew what induced the action, he found himself standing, dark and stern, at Malcolm's side, with one hand on the youth's shoulder, entreating him to greater calmness, to attend patiently, and hear Mr. Westwood's reply.

"Let me talk to you," said that individual, turning from Malcolm with an angry gesture; "let me talk to you, as you seem disposed to be a friend to those who will, I fancy, ere long require friendship from many a one who will not be ready to extend it to them. It is useless speaking to him; the boy is a fool—a child, not in understanding, but in wayward passion, absurd caprice, senseless prejudice; do you act for him, and lose no time; search every

drawer, box, desk, safe, in the house, possible or impossible, and see if you can discover a will. I intend to proceed to Mr. Merapie's solicitors, and see whether they possess any document of the kind; and if not, I request that some disinterested person may search the office. It is of no importance to me whether any be discovered or not, further than that I wish well to this ungrateful youth, and the two delicate beings, who may be reduced to beggary by *the absence* of such an instrument. Directly or indirectly I shall never benefit by my late partner's demise. Mr. Frazer's suspicions have done me most foul wrong. I think it the height of villainy in any man to attempt to step between relatives; and if I were left sole legatee to-day, the only use I should make of my wealth would be to hand it over to the rightful owners to-morrow. Do not let prejudice blind you; have the house thoroughly examined: I am giving good sound advice, for which, perhaps, at a future day, even Mr. Malcolm Frazer may thank me."

He made a step forward, as if to leave the room, but Ernest detained him.

"Tell me," he said, "what it is you mean? Are not Mrs. Frazer and her children the sole living connections Mr. Merapie has left behind him?"

"They are not," replied Mr. Westwood.

"Has he any nearer relatives?" demanded Mr. Ivraine.

"Time will show," was the brief response uttered, as Mr. Westwood pushed Malcolm—who stood like a statue, gazing intently and half stupidly in his face—gently aside, and walked past him out of the room and down the stairs and so out of the house.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEXT OF KIN.

THE hunt for the lady, so faithfully recorded in the song called "The Mistletoe Bough," was a mere apology for a search in comparison to that Ernest Ivraine forthwith instituted from garret to cellar of number 12, Belerma Square; and the reason is obvious: in the first case, "only a wife" was the article missing; in the last, an all-important document was required to be found. Had the poor bride been a piece of parchment, blackened over with legal hieroglyphics, rely upon it she would have been discovered in a very brief period; for, in that event, no place, likely or unlikely, no nook, cranny, box, hole, or spring chest, no matter how long it might have "lain hid," would have been neglected or overlooked: the value of the thing absent, makes all the difference possible in the zeal and activity and sharp-sightedness of the searchers: and who on

earth, possessed of half an ounce of common sense or worldly prudence, would look with the same indefatigable industry after a lost woman as for a lost will?

Malcolm was in far too unsettled a state of mind to be of any very great assistance, but he did his best; whilst Mr. Ivraine laboured through desks and papers and *secretoires* with as much interest as though the whole of his future welfare depended on the existence of a proper testament—sealed, signed, and delivered. The sheet of foolscap that had been discovered lying before John Merapie's corpse, upon which the merchant had probably been engaged, when death, so abruptly entering the chamber, interrupted him in his labours, proved, on examination, to be the commencement of an unfinished will; but it was merely the commencement, for after a short preamble, in which a life annuity was devised to his sister, payable quarterly, came the words, "and to my beloved niece, Mina Frazer, I bequeath the sum of——"

Here the chill visitor had seized his hand, apparently with so firm and sudden a grasp that the pen dropped from his lifeless fingers before another syllable could be added; and he carried the knowledge of what he had intended leaving his niece to

the grave with him. He remembered her, and tried to repair a fatal error whilst standing on death's very threshold; but that was all Mina or any one else ever knew about it—he had died almost in the very act of writing her name. The girl wept bitterly when she heard that; but she had still more cause to weep in after years that he expired, before being able to carry the good thought fully out—before the kind intention assumed the firm unchangeable character of a deed.

Alfred Westwood, "prowling," as Malcolm had stated, about the house, perused the few brief lines the paper contained, and gathered from them, before descending to the drawing-room, the certainty that John Merapie had died intestate. Ernest Ivraine read it also, after hearing Mr. Westwood's words of "friendly" warning, and—he did not know himself exactly why—but the fact of an incomplete will existing, made him feel doubly anxious to find a perfect one; and, accordingly, he pored over deeds and fitted keys to locks and searched and hunted through every place, possible and impossible, where a deed of the kind could by any accident have been mislaid or secreted.

But in vain; everything but the required document was forthcoming; and, at length, fairly dis-

pirited and disappointed, Ernest Ivraine came to the conclusion that if no will could be discovered in the dining-room, the key of which Dr. Richards had in his pocket, no such deed existed; for Mr. Westwood had most considerately despatched a messenger from Wapping to inform them that the late Mr. Merapie's solicitors were not in possession of the desired paper, and that not a vestige of any testamentary disposition of property could be detected at the office, though such exertions were used in prosecuting the search as must inevitably have led to its discovery had it been forthcoming.

"We want the key of this apartment, if you please, doctor," said Ernest, addressing the little M.D., who, after listening to a detail of the hints Mr. Westwood had thrown out some hours previously, reluctantly unlocked the door of the dining-room, and gave the pair admission as they desired.

Mina was lying back in the easy chair, just as they had left her, buried in that profound stupor which more resembles death than sleep. There she sate, her countenance pale as that of a corpse, her long dark hair hanging in disordered masses over her face, neck, and shoulders; one hand was flung carelessly over the arm of the chair, the other she pressed tightly, even in slumber, upon her heart, as

if some dreadful pain abode there; her breathing was scarcely audible; and altogether she looked so unlike a living being—she so resembled that which appals our humanity—as to cause Ernest Ivraine to exclaim, turning a quick glance on the doctor,

"Can you waken her?"

"All in good time," he replied, calmly.

"Was it not rather a dangerous experiment?" persisted Ernest.

"I am sure it was," here broke in Malcolm; "if I had been here she should never have been so dosed: I wish Dr. Richards," he added, speaking passionately, like a wilful yet frightened child, "I wish you had let her alone; I really do not know what right you had so to stupify her, at a time when she could have been of such use too: she would have been able to tell about this paper at once, as she used to arrange my uncle's books and desks for him; do try and rouse her."

"I tell you what it is, young man," retorted Dr. Richards, savagely, "if you have no regard for your sister, I have, and, therefore, instead of submitting to be ordered by you, I insist that you carry the girl to her own room, and leave her there in peace; she will wake soon enough, poor child, without your hurrying the process: remember, in any house where

a patient of mine resides, I am master for the time being, so do what I desire; you are strong enough, surely, to bear so light a burden; and I tell you it is necessary almost to her very existence that she should sleep on for some time longer."

Very sulkily Malcolm Frazer complied with the doctor's command, and then, spite of the little man's pooh poohing, and speaking of their pursuit as unfeeling, mercenary, and so forth, he and Ernest recommenced their search, but all in vain: there was no will, and John Merapie had died intestate.

For hours Ernest Ivraine sat by the dim firelight, striving one moment to comfort Malcolm for the loss of a good, kind relative, and the next endeavouring to persuade him the absence of a will was a matter of little or no consequence, as—even supposing other relatives did present themselves—there was surely sufficient property to give several individuals handsome fortunes; but still—why, he did not know—Ernest's heart misgave him: Mr. Westwood's face, more than his words, had impressed him with the dread of impending evil; he distrusted the man with his cold, polite, perfectly imperturbable manner, with his fixed smile and sarcastic expression; and the malicious triumphant look he had noticed in his countenance as he shoved Malcolm

aside, had filled the baronet's son with more alarm than a volume of threatening sentences from any other individual could have done. Still, however, he did his best to console the youth just entering upon life, whom he who knew most about John Merapie's affairs had said *might* be reduced to beggary; he spoke soothingly, hopefully, strove to pacify his fears, calm his excitement, and induce him to forget his sorrows even for an instant.

Ernest Ivraine had never talked so before, not even to Henry; but he felt as if he were comforting a child, not a man,—a wayward, dependent, half-formed creature, not one his equal in any way, in mind, character, or experience.

At last he partially succeeded in his endeavour of diverting the conversation from the events of the last twenty-four hours; the dead and the missing deed had not been spoken of for some five minutes previously, and Malcolm was looking with a calmer quieter expression of face into the fire, when a loud ring of the house bell—a peal such as might have sufficed to break even the repose of the "seven sleepers"—caused him to start from his seat, nervously exclaiming,

"Good heavens! what is that?"

"Sit down," said Ernest, thrusting him back into

his chair and holding him there; but the quick anxious ear caught a sound of hurried words and rapid footsteps. The next instant the dining-room door was flung violently open, and the servant announced, in a voice shrill with surprise and excitement,

"*Mrs.* Merapie, sir."

"Widow of the late Mr. John Merapie," added a determined looking woman, still handsome and, comparatively speaking, young, who advanced into the dining-room and uttered the above sentence by way of a pleasant explanatory introduction. Ernest Ivraine gazed for an instant curiously on her, and, as he did so, unconsciously relaxed his hold of Malcolm, who, making one resolute effort, released himself altogether, crossed the room at a single bound, and darted up the staircase with the rapidity of the wind.

"Mina," he yelled rather than spoke, flinging himself down by the side of the couch, "Mina, for God's sake waken and speak to me; I shall go mad if you don't: uncle John has left no will and he has a wife, and we—we are beggars!"

The way he screamed out the words thrilled every nerve of the girl's body. Like one roused from the dead by the powerful aid of galvanism she

started up, her large eyes distended, her body quivering with excessive fear and horror.

"Speak to me," he again cried out; "oh! Mina, Mina, we are beggars!"

A sort of convulsive throe shook her frame for a moment; then Mina Frazer, burying her face in her hands, strove to realize the meaning of the words she just had heard.

When she raised her head again she was calm and cold as stone, and she rose and took her brother's hand in hers and bade him tell her all; then she put an arm round his neck and kissed him two or three times over—why, she did not know—and she sat down and talked to him for a few minutes.

She was composed now; the potion had done its work; she had awakened, as Dr. Richards said she would, too soon,—ah! yes, too soon by far.

CHAPTER X.

A PROPOSAL.

MORNING at length broke—as it will break, after hours of pain and watching and trial—type of that glorious eternity which must eventually, sooner or later, succeed to, and dispel the darkness of, the dreariest existence that ever fell to the lot of mortal man—man who is "born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards."

It dawned, bright, cold, and clear, upon that miniature nation, that vast human beehive, filled with all sorts of labourers and drones, that city of wealth and solidity and striking contrasts and world-wide renown—London, the mighty, and silent and beautiful: its beams fell on the windows of number 12, Belerma Square, and, spite of drawn blinds and closed shutters, found, by some means, an entrance into each dingy, desolate apartment.

The rays, at first dim and uncertain, straggled in

through a chink to the room where the corpse was lying, and cast strange lights on the ceiling, floor, and walls; then gathering strength, one among them crept curiously forward, little by little, bit by bit, till it finally fell full on the calm, still face of the dead. There it rested for a considerable period, as if content to remain stationary over that emblem of mortality, whilst its brethren peered into other parts of the chamber and obtruded their cheerful presence into other portions of the house.

Light, full, clear, and brilliant, at length streamed on every corner in the mansion, into the apartment where John Merapie's unfeeling widow sat, exulting over the change in her condition, over the grand wide prospect now spread out before herself and her only child, a boy some twelve years old —hard, keen, precocious, selfish, like his parent; whilst, on the next floor, Malcolm and Mina kept together in their mother's dressing-room, talking and wondering and waiting for some indefinite event, which they felt to be approaching towards them with hurried, rapid strides.

It was strange, almost pitiable, to notice how Malcolm—for the time being thoroughly broken down and prostrated by the force of the unexpected blow —hung like a child about his sister, followed her

every step, watched her every look; he seemed so impressed by the calmness of her manner, as to entertain a vague idea that she would be able to effect some arrangement for their benefit; he appeared to feel that, whilst with her, no fresh sorrow could come near them: she spoke so little, made so few laments about their misfortunes, exhorted him so earnestly not to give way, not to look at the very blackest side of things till they knew for a certainty there was no other; seemed to consider the sorrow of their uncle's death so much more than the pecuniary difficulty, that Malcolm, who never looked beyond the surface, imagined her cold, collected manner was the sign of a hopeful heart instead of a breaking one, of a spirit buoyed up by expectations of sunshine speedily bursting through the gloom, instead of a soul nerved to endure and meet the worst by firmness of purpose, by natural strength of character.

In answer to his incessant query of, "But, Mina, what are we to do?" she had invariably answered,

"Wait, for the present, and see."

But as eight, nine, half-past nine o'clock came, passed, and brought no further knowledge on their rapid wings, even she grew restless to learn their doom for a certainty; and, therefore, going to the fountain head direct, she sent in a message to Mr.

Westwood, requesting a few minutes' conversation with that gentleman.

"Why could you not have asked to see *her*, Mina, at once?" inquired Malcolm; but his sister shrunk from an interview with the imperious stranger, of whose loud commanding voice and haughty overbearing manner, the servants had brought such hurried intelligence to her the preceding night, so she answered,

"Mr. Westwood can tell me all I want to know much better, and I am accustomed to speak to him, whilst I have never even seen her." And, accordingly, the message was despatched to Mr. Westwood, who received it just as he was in the act of pouring out his last cup of coffee.

"She will be glad enough to see me *now*," he soliloquised, "in spite of the airs she used to give herself, glad enough to see me now, and hear me speak, and ready enough to speak to me; I always knew it was pride: but I am of a forgiving disposition and will overlook past offences, particularly as she has made the first advance to reconciliation, and I will marry her, though I might do far better. Yes; I vowed I would, and I never broke a vow yet, but one; but, oh! what a confounded thing it is to have a conscience."

Having concluded which peroration, he struck his hand upon his forehead and then walked quietly into number 12 and up the wide staircase leading to the drawing-room he had so often entered during the lifetime of his late partner.

There was a lady in the apartment when he crossed the threshold, but it was not Mina Frazer. She was a woman, not young, but still in the prime of life, with fair hair, clear red and white complexion, large blue eyes, pouting mouth, and high smooth forehead, the *beau ideal* of a "vulgar beauty:" it was only the quick determined glance and somewhat aristocratic curve of the scornful upper lip that redeemed her face from the general impression of commonness the remainder of her features conveyed to the beholder.

Without word, without salutation, without apology, Alfred Westwood, turning, perhaps, a shade paler than usual and keeping his eyes steadily fixed on her countenance, advanced towards the new-made widow.

She had wheeled round when he first came in, and contemplated him, for an instant, with an indifferent, half-curious, half-defiant expression of face; but as he drew slowly nearer and nearer, that expression gave place to one of doubt, surprise,

terror; and, suddenly stretching out both arms, as if to prevent his approach, she uttered a short startled cry and fell back in a dead swoon.

With a fierce stormy cloud on his brow, Alfred Westwood remained contemplating her for a moment: he never moved a finger to lift her; the idea of endeavouring to restore consciousness never seemed to occur to him.

"Yes, woman, yes," he muttered, after he had scanned every lineament with a settled stare of hatred; and then something like an oath came hissing forth from between his tightly-set teeth, a sort of malediction breathed over the inanimate form of John Merapie's widow: there could be no doubt of the matter, he was inwardly cursing her.

But at length remembering he had not come there merely to look at the face of a fainting woman, he laid a hand on the bell pull, and then stooping, raised, with no very compassionate or gentle gesture, Mrs. Merapie from the ground.

"Take care of your mistress," he said to the former housekeeper, Mrs. Colefort, who appeared in answer to his summons. "Let Miss Frazer be told I await her in the dining-room: after a short time I will speak to Mrs. Merapie here;" and, without casting another glance on the person last mentioned,

he strode out of the apartment to seek some other portion of the citadel not yet occupied by the enemy, where he might hold a few minutes' uninterrupted conversation with Mina Frazer.

"I will go with you," Malcolm pleaded, as his sister rose to leave the room when Mr. Westwood's message was delivered to her; but she answered,

"No, no; stay with mamma," and ran down the stairs without him.

The visitor had drawn a mental portrait of how she would appear before him,—a pale, despairing, stricken, suppliant, a being as different as possible from the Mina of former and more prosperous days as can well be conceived: tears, lamentations, entreaties,—he had pictured them all, and smiled grimly and contemptuously as he did so. He had fully prepared himself to meet one sort of feminine sorrow; to speak words of hope and comfort to one who came to him as to the sole friend misfortune had left her, whose pride had yielded to her poverty, whose vanity had melted away together with the dream of riches, which was, as he conceived, the sole cause of her former coldness and reserve towards him.

Standing with his back to the fire-place, looking at the pattern on the hearthrug, Mr. Westwood had

drawn the above fancy sketch, which a nearer view, a few moments after, pronounced to be, in many most important respects, erroneous.

Pale and calm, though bearing on her face unmistakable marks of the blow which had struck her heart, the girl came gliding in: changed she was—changed, but not as he expected to find her; changed by sudden sorrow, a great trial, an agonizing fear; changed, but not bowed: she looked as if she had passed through a chastening lifetime of trouble since last he beheld her, a sea of danger and strife and uncertainty, which had only braced her nerves and developed some traits of greater firmness in her character; altered she was for the better for herself, perhaps; but he saw, and saw it with bitter anger, for the worse for him.

They shook hands in silence, as people do shake hands upon the occasion of their first meeting after some great misfortune has blasted the happiness of one; the eloquent sentence he had prepared to check a torrent of imaginary tears died away on Mr. Westwood's lips.

Instead of his being the first to speak as he had intended, she broke the stillness of that room where city men had laughed solemnly over their wine, by saying, whilst she pointed to a chair,

"Will you not be seated?"

"Cool, with a vengeance," thought Mr. Westwood, dropping into the chair, however, as meekly as if he, not Mina, had been, as the newspaper advertisement phrase runs, "the party in distress."

"I have sent for you——" Mina began.

"Sent, indeed!" soliloquised the indignant visitor, whilst she proceeded,

"To learn from your lips precisely how we are situated."

"Right to the point, at all events," he reflected; and the conclusion of her sentence reminding him of her exact position and of the elevated pinnacle he, by comparison, occupied, his former confidence returned, and he accordingly replied to her simple question by demanding what she meant.

"I believe," she resumed, "you know everything" (the girl did not intend this as a compliment, but Mr. Westwood accepted it as such), "and therefore I thought I would ask you how the fact of my uncle being married will affect us now he is dead?" The white lips trembled slightly as she spoke. "My brother seems to fear we shall be reduced to penury; I do not clearly understand, but—is it so?"

"If I do not mistake your meaning, you wish information on three points," answered Mr. West-

wood in a blunt straightforward sort of way: "first, if the person who arrived here last night be no impostor; second, whether she and her son take precedence of you and your brother; third, if any money will be left for you out of the wreck. Am I right?" he demanded.

"Yes, I think so," she replied.

"Before going any further," he responded, "I must ask you whether your uncle has left a will behind him? for if so, the aspect of your affairs might be considerably brightened."

"Malcolm says not," she returned.

"Did he look?" asked Mr. Westwood.

"Mr. Ivraine did, I believe," she replied, "but nothing finished; nothing but the few lines he died before completing could be discovered."

A dry burning sensation, caused by excess of agitation and the absence of tears, oppressed the girl's aching eyeballs as she spoke of that document, and Mr. Westwood, noticing the look of pain, asked if she were ill.

"No, not very; that is, not at all: please go on."

"I feared, from the commencement, there was none," he resumed; "your uncle promised me he would make some provision for you, and I presume was just about to carry out his intention when——

but we need pursue that painful topic no further," he added, with exquisite consideration. "With regard to the marriage, I have known it for some considerable time. Mrs. Merapie and her son succeed to *all* the money your uncle left behind him, the widow claiming one-third, the boy the remainder; and there will be nothing for yourself, mother, or brother, either now or at any future time."

"Nothing?" she repeated.

"Not a solitary shilling," he returned; "you have now no home, for you were merely here on sufferance from the moment of your uncle's demise: you wish to learn the worst, and I tell it to you. Mrs. Merapie is so indignant at having been kept in the background for such a number of years, that she is eager to retaliate a little on those who she imagines, during that interval, usurped her house and her position: you are liable, at any moment, to rudeness and insolence; you are perfectly powerless to resent either, as nothing here—not a single article the place contains, excepting your own personal effects—belongs to you or yours. I am speaking frankly, as you desired; it is best, perhaps, for you to learn these facts from the lips of a friend than to hear them, for the first time, spoken by an arbitrary vindictive woman."

Though his words were stinging, still the tone was not unkind. Mina looked for a moment right into the fire, whilst a faint colour suffused her cheek and a sudden gush of her old pride, a sad thought of how truly desolate they were, swept across her soul: the next instant she was calm again, and said in a low voice, as if communing with herself,

"Then we are beggars."

Mr. Westwood made no response; indeed, none was required.

"Thank you," she said, after a brief pause, rising, as if about to leave the room, "thank you, very much for devoting your time to me: I know all I want to know, now."

"More than it has been a pleasure to me to communicate," returned Alfred Westwood, who felt something nearer genuine love for the girl now than he had ever done before. "Miss Frazer," he hurriedly added, "this is no time, these are no circumstances under which to consider ceremony; will you excuse my again adverting to a subject we discussed in happier days? If you would only give me a right to assist you, I will lay down my life to serve you: I cannot promise what, perhaps, once you had reason to expect, but I can give you a comfortable home, a competence, sterling affection. Mrs. Frazer and

you are both unfitted to bear the chill blast of misfortune: I can provide a shelter as good as this, at all events; I will help your brother to wealth, fortune, position; I will guard you more tenderly now than even might have been the case had your lot been a more fortunate one. Sorrow only makes real love stronger; I can preserve you from knowledge of poverty, from grief, anxiety, vexation: only speak one word, and I will smooth every difficulty away from your path and devote my whole existence to making yours happy."

There was no doubt about the matter now, so Mina thought; she had done him great injustice: he had not been a mere mercenary fortune hunter; in the hour of gloom, in the dark time of trial, he remained unchanged; he had been weighed in the balance, and not found wanting; he had been subject to the test, and discovered to be the sterling article. Mina felt touched, softened—as what woman would not under similar circumstances? There could be no mistake concerning his disinterestedness at that moment; and though Mina felt no hesitation as to the nature of her reply, still she paused for a moment ere uttering it.

Slowly—not as they had done twice previously, rapidly and indignantly—the words of refusal were

uttered: she could not marry him; she was very, very grateful, but it could not be.

"Think though," said Alfred Westwood, "of your desolate position: a delicate mother, a brother out of employment, all near relatives dead, hundreds of miles from any who feel an interest in you; think of having to go from hence without another place of shelter being provided for you, of the skeleton poverty, of the daily fret and difficulty of procuring, not luxuries, but the merest necessaries; think of poor mean lodgings, the expense of medical attendance, the hopeless struggle, the endless pinching and saving, the eternal outlay and demand; think that the chief part of all this anxiety will fall on you, that friends will grow cold and relatives careless and acquaintances callous. It requires some time to realize such a position; therefore all I ask at present is, for you to think of it. I have striven to keep myself and my own wishes and everything, save yourself and your ultimate good, in the background; but let me just remind you that this is not a mere affair of sudden caprice or wayward fancy: I have loved you for years, ever since you—then quite a child—came, with your Highland heart and thoughts fixed intently on the moors and the hills and the streams of your native land, to be

caged up and imprisoned in a dull, depressing London square; and now I love you better than formerly, because I have latterly learnt more thoroughly to appreciate your character."

Here was a change, indeed,—Mr. Alfred Westwood, instead of conferring the immense honour of his hand on a portionless girl, instead of graciously hearing her trembling petition for succour and help, and acceding with triumphant superiority,—begging her to marry him, as he might in the hey-day of her prosperity; the more difficult the prize became to gain, the more valuable it appeared in his eyes. He had formerly thought her a good catch, a pretty little self-willed being; but now she seemed something more, a reasoning, reflecting, brave-hearted girl, looking sorrow so steadily and undauntedly in the face, suffering so much, talking so little, that the man of the world, quite losing his wonted self-possession, absolutely forgot for once to act and simulate, became natural, unaffected, earnest, and spoke in those tones of truth which strike home to the understanding.

Mina Frazer felt her bosom swell and her conscience reproach her with ingratitude as she listened to him, whom in prosperity she had despised and rejected, renewing his suit with double ardour, now

she had fallen from her great estate and stood a pauper hearkening to his tale.

She did think, too; the rapid procession of mother, brother, self—of the probable future and the certain present—of scanty means and expensive tastes and contending opinions—of ill health and discontent—of murmurs, repinings, reproaches, regrets, —swept across that stage we call the mind. There was not a spectre he had conjured up before her, which did not appear in obedience to his command.

The troop wanted nothing but reality to make them perfect; but the girl had never yet experienced actual poverty, never known a day's want, never been short of money in her life; therefore the phantoms presented for her contemplation were, after all, merely phantoms. She certainly would have preferred not encountering them at all, but she did not dread them sufficiently to prefer marrying Mr. Westwood to going forth and meeting them; they were a chance, he a certainty: she had thought if it might not be her duty for one brief instant, and then she reflected, an union without affection never could be otherwise than a sin: "It could not be; it could never be," so she told him.

"I shall not receive that as a final answer," he returned; "think more about your situation, give

yourself time to understand the danger and difficulty of your position; look on both sides—at the prospect the world presents, and the love and security and home I offer; ponder the matter sensibly, quietly, rationally, and then decide: meanwhile, consider me as a friend, a sincere, though humble one, and——"

What he was about to propose she should do with him when she had got the length of friendship must ever remain a mystery, for at this juncture the door of the dining-room opened and in stalked Mr. Ernest Ivraine, who seemed destined to interrupt or overhear every dialogue Mr. Westwood held, whereof matrimony was the theme.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, finding that he had happened to stumble in on the wrong people at the wrong time: "I wish to see Mr. Malcolm Frazer."

"You will find him in the breakfast parlour," fibbed Mr. Westwood, angrily; and hastily precluding the possibility of a reply from Mina, and seeing his presence was most unwelcome, the baronet's son walked across the hall, and, entering the vacant breakfast parlour, sat down to wait in patience till some one should have leisure or inclination to come and see what he was doing.

Mina could not tell why she blushed to the temples when Ernest Ivraine appeared so suddenly before her, but she felt the tell-tale blood mount to her cheek while Alfred Westwood saw it; and, forgetting everything but indignation at the advent of a supposed rival, he turned almost fiercely and said, as if it had been a criminal he was addressing, so totally devoid of consideration and respect was his manner,

"So that 's the way of it, is it?"

"Sir!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, yes," he continued, "I see it all; a baronet's son would be a very nice catch: a protracted illness is a capital time for——"

"Mr. Westwood," she vehemently interposed, "how can you allude to such matters at a time when my heart is bleeding for the loss of a kind, beloved relative, when my mind is distracted with our unhappy situation, when I have less leisure and less inclination than ever to hear subjects of the kind discussed? Your remark was worse than mistimed, it was unfeeling and cruel; but," she added, seeing the scarcely suppressed sneer which curled his lip, "let me assure you, Mr. Ivraine is nothing to me, except an acquaintance, a friend, like yourself."

"So I thought," remarked Mr. Westwood drily.

"I mean," she eagerly explained, "that he is merely a friend to us, nothing, nothing more; like what you offered to be a little time since, like what I feel to you."

"Oh, indeed!" sneered Mr. Westwood, who had managed to forget Ernest's very existence during the course of his conversation with Mina till that gentleman, walking so unhappily in, reminded him of it; "Oh, indeed!"

"I think it very unkind," began Mina, her large eyes filling with tears of mortification, wounded sensitiveness, pride, irritation, and resentment, "and——"

"Mrs. Merapie's compliments, Miss, and would be glad to know when you can leave the house," here broke in the *ci-devant* housekeeper, flinging open the door and addressing the above speech to the young lady from a hostile position she occupied on the mat outside.

Mr. Westwood turned with a triumphant glance to see how "Mina took it." It seemed to him as if every drop of blood forsook its accustomed channel to rush into her face. The tears dried on the quivering lashes, her eyes seemed literally to flash fire, and as she repeated the words "leave the house,"

her nostrils distended and her bosom heaved like one restraining, by a violent effort, the outburst of a paroxysm of passion.

"Yes, Miss," responded Mrs. Colefort, "she says she just wants to know, and then she can make her arrangements accordingly, and so she sent me to you to ask when you will leave."

"Now," said Mina, in a tone so emphatic that it implied more than a dozen sentences could have done, and quickly sent Mrs. Colefort back to her mistress, silently admiring the spirit which dictated it.

"Mina," said Mr. Westwood, as she too turned to leave the room, "Mina, matters have hurried much more than even I feared they would do; for mercy's sake let me counsel and assist you; give me liberty to act for you: I spoke hastily a few minutes back, forgive me; do not refuse help when you stand so lamentably in want of it."

"If you will help me as a friend," she returned, "if you will forget everything which has heretofore passed between us, and let us start afresh on that footing, I shall gratefully accept your offer; God knows, friends are not so plentiful we can afford to refuse any, nor are they likely now to become more so."

There was a deep accent of despair running

through the hurried current of her words; she looked imploringly at him, as if she would have accepted succour almost from an enemy; but Mr. Westwood was not to be "done" now. He rapidly reflected that if he could not mould the iron of the girl's heart into the shape he wished in its present heated pliable condition, he had no chance of effecting his object in calmer, cooler moments; he had no idea of working for her now, and being rejected afterwards; he saw events were moving with such giant strides, that it was needful for some decided steps to be taken at once, and he therefore thrust his former scheme of friendship and gratitude impatiently aside, and, with a vivid memory of Mina's look when Ernest Ivraine entered, tincturing his speech, he returned,

"You must give me a right to interfere in your concerns; after toiling and working for your benefit and the benefit of those dearest to you, I have no desire to be cast aside as a worthless instrument—a tool which is no longer required; to have your brother call me a meddling fellow; to have others considering me, perhaps, obtrusive, officious, presumptuous; and, by way of a finish, when I have done all I can in your behalf—when I have completed my task, and placed you beyond the reach of

want, to hear you coldly say how 'grateful' you are, and bid me good-bye, wishing all the time it had been possible to do without me, and that any other person save myself had been able to assist you in your need."

Once again Mina felt every syllable he had said was true; she knew Malcolm would resent his interference the moment it ceased to be of importance; that she should feel gratitude towards him a wonderfully irksome burden; that obligation to him would be insupportable: besides, unless she married him, or promised to marry him, what could he do for her or hers which she could endure to accept from his hands? No, she would not receive assistance from him; she and Malcolm were young; there was plenty of work open in the world for both; she would rely on herself and those in whom she had trusted for years, not on a man whom, even whilst she acknowledged she had wronged, she disliked,—of whom, almost in spite of herself, she felt a distrust. He had proffered service to her, and she was grateful for that kindness; but further she could not go, more she would not say.

"It cannot be," she repeated, "I can give you no right. I thank you for the kindness you have been wishful to show, most sincerely. Let us part

friends," she added, extending her hand, "it may be long before we meet again."

"If I had influence enough with this woman to wring out of her an annuity for your mother, would it make no difference in your sentiments towards me?" thoughtlessly demanded Mr. Westwood, thrown off his guard and provoked by the girl's inexplicable refusal to become his wife; and the question let light in on her understanding; she saw through him now; trickery will reveal itself at last; she comprehended him fully, but she made no reply.

"If you will but say, 'Yes,' to one simple request," he proceeded, "I will undertake to represent your case to her in such a way as will ensure a small competence for Mrs. Frazer, and, perhaps, a commission for your brother; give me the right to interfere, and I will use the little influence I possess to some purpose."

"Do you think," said Mina, fixing a steady, searching gaze upon him, "do you think you could manage to get me a fortune?"

The words were spoken in a cold, almost careless, tone, yet they made Mr. Westwood look as confused as if he had been detected in a robbery, and though he tried to stammer out an answer, his usual volubility had forsaken him.

"No, no," said Mina, "I see you were not as disinterested as I thought; I am very sorry for it."

"I am thoroughly disinterested," he interrupted; "I could contrive to get as much to portion any bride I might choose perhaps; or, better still, wed your uncle's widow, and so get all into my own hands. I am speaking fairly now; I love you, and you are the only being on earth I do love; once for all, will you marry me?"

"I will not," she answered.

"And you cast from you my assistance, and consequently, any chance of fortune for yourself and your brother, or a competence for your mother; you cut off the sole hope of reconciliation, or rather, of a commencement of friendly feeling, between your family and Mrs. Merapie; you fling yourself without a shelter, almost a pauper, on the world: will you do this?"

"If you have any influence, as you seem to imply, having received my final answer and knowing my positive decision, I leave all the rest to your generosity."

"To the devil," muttered Mr. Alfred Westwood, stamping furiously on the carpet as Mina left the apartment; "well, be it so, Miss Frazer; you shall repent this yet."

Long, long afterwards, when he had concluded a confidential conversation with Mrs. Merapie and was just about taking his departure from the house, Mr. Westwood encountered some weeping servants carrying boxes, bags, portmanteaus, etc., into the hall.

"What's this for?" he demanded.

"They are going," was the brief reply.

"What, now?" he ejaculated.

"Immediately, sir."

"Smart work, egad!" soliloquised the *ci-devant* clerk, once again re-ascending the staircase, in the hope of meeting Mina, for if there were one thing more than another he admired, it was a commodity he mentally styled "pluck," of which it appeared the lady of his affections had an abundant store.

She had gone into the room where the corpse lay, after everything was prepared for their abrupt departure; she had fallen on her knees by the side of the bed, and kissed the pale cold face with a passion of affection she had never felt for her uncle in life; tears of regret and anguish fell abundantly on the countenance of the dead, and the drops remained there till Mrs. Colefort came and removed the moisture, for the natural heat had departed, which once would have absorbed them.

"Dear, dear uncle," she moaned forth, "where

shall I ever find another friend like you? No place in the wide world."

And then she took one long farewell of the inanimate body, as if it had been a living being dearly loved she never hoped to see again; and, passing drearily out of the room, was met on the threshold by Alfred Westwood.

"I will give you another chance, Mina," he said, "I offer you fortune, position, establishment, affection: will you marry me?"

"No!" she responded; and, drawing her veil closely over her tearful face, she passed him hastily to meet on the next landing the lady who now called that place home, and had come so cruelly, and with such unnecessary haste, to dispossess them of it.

Their dresses brushed together as Mina swept by her with the proud defiant carriage of her childhood; there was no pause, no salutation, no word: for an instant the broken-hearted girl seemed superior to the triumphant haughty woman, for there was a confused upstart endeavour at unconcern visible in the manner of the one, and nothing but contemptuous indifference in the bearing of the other; the slight figure had been drawn up to its full height, but there was nothing of stiffness about

the way in which she discharged her portion of the ceremony, while an awkward attempt at well-bred stateliness failed altogether on the side of Mrs. Merapie.

"Cleverly done, in truth," thought Mr. Westwood, who witnessed the little scene from his position above; "a very good beginning, Miss Mina: well, they may talk as they like about men doing things better than women, but there is one point the ladies excel in, and that is, cutting one another: why, I could not have passed my worst enemy with the same cool disdain as that girl has just done if it were to save my life."

And Mr. Westwood, having concluded this sentence, and given the *pas*—as every one does—to the feminine sex for natural talents in the grand science above alluded to, exchanged a few more words with the widow of his late partner, and then left her; but, while he was talking, a cab had driven from the hall door, bearing another widow and her two children to comfortless lodgings—to a new home—drearily, sadly conveying them out into the world; and from that time forth the house in Belerma Square "knew them no more;" and that place which had once been a home, became, to all intents and purposes unto them as though it had never been.

CHAPTER XI.

MINA "IN TRAINING."

A SPACE of three months has passed away since the conclusion of the preceding chapter, unmarked by any events, save such as may be chronicled in a few brief lines—spoken of and dismissed in a single passage.

It seemed at first as if the violence of the blow had neutralised its painful effects—as though the dreadful shock, the abrupt descent, the desperate fall, had produced—after the momentary pain—a sort of mental stupor, numbness, or apathy, which rendered the sufferers, for a period, almost insensible to the anguish they endured, and prevented their comprehending the nature and extent of the misfortune which had befallen them; and, before they awoke from this torpor, so long a time had elapsed that the first sting of the reverse was past—the first force of the blow expended. Bitterness

enough remained behind assuredly; but it was not the unbearable bitterness which had filled their hearts to overflowing during the dreary twenty-four hours succeeding their bereavement and loss of fortune.

There is something healing in the mere passage of time, something soothing in the very flutter of his wings; so the mourners discovered when, at last, they recovered sufficiently from the sort of stupefaction into which they had been thrown, to be able to raise their heads a little and look, as some of the Irish who occasionally cross the Channel in search of employment express it, "the trouble in the face."

For the all-important "time-being," they were by no means badly off; there was the amount Allan Frazer had settled, when a young subaltern, on his wife, still untouched, and, so long as one thousand pounds lasted, the "battle of life" promised to be anything rather than a losing game, a hopeless struggle, a weary, unprofitable fight.

"But when it was done?"

Mina once propounded this question and was met by Malcolm with a "Pooh, pooh, child! then I 'll provide for you."

"How?" she further ventured, and he concluded

the conversation by answering, "How! any how," and walked out of the room, softly whistling the "British Grenadiers;" for Malcolm was now more independent than ever he had been. His mother never said he spent too much; never wondered where the last ten pounds had gone; never refused further advances, thought everything he did and said was right; lay helpless on a sofa in West End lodgings, visited by a doctor whose charges in town were only a guinea a time, and in the country only a guinea a mile; and distracted Mina by rushing into and countenancing expenses which made fearful inroads into the thousand pounds, and foretold that, before any immense time had elapsed, the amount standing to their credit on the books of a bank in Fleet Street would be easily described and easier counted as nought.

When, at length, Mina began to look with fearful eyes at their enormous expenditure, the evil had proceeded too far to be checked; Malcolm found the life he was leading too easy and pleasant to be readily abandoned; Mrs. Frazer still thought money would "turn up," that the thousand pounds would last for ever, that there was no use in such "niggardly economy;" in fact, with all canvass set, she and her son were evidently bent on sailing down

upon the black shore—poverty: and what could Mina—who, of course, had no control of the money —do?

Very little, but spend nothing herself and drift along the current leading to destruction as patiently and resignedly as might be.

The trial of woman's life was already upon her; and in the hard school of daily discipline, in expensive lodgings near Eaton Square, with money flying about and squandered as Mina had never seen money squandered before, she commenced to learn the verb "to bear" through; it took her years and years thoroughly to master the task, but patience does a deal, and everything in this life, we know, must have a beginning; even the "British constitution" had one, why not Mina Frazer's patience?

She was being put into "training" at last, so Miss Caldera said. What a pity young hearts, like young horses, require to be "broken in;" what a "breaking down" it frequently proves; what a common-place affair it makes of life, being driven through it "in harness." How differently people view the world when wandering untrammelled at their own sweet wills, free to stay, free to roam, free to stop, and free to go, from what they deem it, when stern necessity compels their daily journey

along a certain "line of rail:" how the flowers lose their perfume; how dark the sky grows; how weary the road seems. What an altogether unsatisfactory affair life appears, hacking, hacking eternally on. The wild colt of the Indian prairie, bounding over the plains free and unconfined, bears not less resemblance to the stupid, ill-used beasts of burden we sigh to look at in the city streets, than does the poverty-stricken wretch, whom misfortune has rendered patient, and sorrow quiet, to the glad impulsive youth, who left his father's roof some years previously, hopeful, buoyant, rejoicing, to go forth and make "his fortune."

He did not mean *that* fortune, however, but so it has "turned out."

No doubt it is all for some good end, to serve some inscrutable purpose, that these perpetual "breakings in" are permitted; and no doubt it was, as Miss Caldera asserted, "very good for Mina" to be instructed in the art of bearing, for the girl was unquestionably learning a great deal very rapidly.

Malcolm said her knowledge was extremely disagreeable, called her his "prudent little sister," said she had a real Scotch head, capable of working out any account and crammed full of £ *s.* *d.*, that

"she was a sordid calculating monster," and many other equally polite names; and when she would have persisted, he told her she was too pretty to turn miser, and not to trouble herself about the money, for that when it was gone he would get more.

Mina, however, had an idea that it would be too late for him to go and look for further supplies when their present stock was quite exhausted; and, accordingly, one evening when Mrs. Frazer, being more ill than usual, had retired earlier than was her wont, leaving Malcolm, as he expressed it, "to the tender mercies of his sister," the latter most determinedly opened fire upon him in the following words:

"Malcolm, do you know how much money we have spent in the last four months?"

"Now, for pity's sake, Mina, do cease eternally harping on that 'monetary' question," he pleaded; "see, I'll play a game at chess with you, or hold silk while you wind it, or listen to you reading a sermon, or do any other disagreeable thing you choose to name, if you will only, my dear, wise little sister, shirk that subject, upon which, it seems to me, you have gone perfectly insane."

"If you will listen to me to-night, I will promise

not to tease you again," she returned; it really is quite necessary for us to talk about the matter: do you know, Malcolm, how much we have spent?"

"No I don't," he responded; "a pretty smart sum, I dare say, for the expenses have been rather heavy: a couple of hundreds, possibly."

"Just three hundred and fifty pounds," she answered.

"Nonsense, child; how could that amount have gone?"

"That I cannot tell," she answered; but it is gone for all that, and if we live the next eight months at the same rate as we have been living for the last four, there will not be a shilling of the thousand left at the end of the year, and——"

"And we shall be fifty in debt besides," supplied Malcolm; "was not that what you were going to add, little Solomon? Well, don't torment about the matter; I will do something before the eight months expire—I will indeed."

"Had not you better do something now, Malcolm?" she demanded: "I wish that while the money is there you would buy a commission."

"Buy a folly," interrupted the young man; "and pray, my dear, how should I live when I had procured it?"

"On your pay," she suggested.

"That's impossible," he said; "I always calculated when I spoke about Uncle John buying me a lieutenantcy, that he would also allow me a hundred a year or so besides to enable me to keep up a gentlemanly appearance: no, I cannot enter the army without private means; I must look out for a genteel and lucrative government appointment; in fact, I have mentioned my wishes to two or three persons, and I mean to set about the business in real right-down earnest whenever we return from our intended visit to Craigmaver: and talking of Craigmaver reminds me that I must write to Mr. Ivraine; have you any message?"

"Why what are you going to write to him about?" she demanded.

"You are as curious as Mother Eve, Mina," replied her brother; "but since you must know, I have been requested by Colin Saunders to procure him an English situation, either as gardener, caretaker, or "useful body," and it has occurred to me that Mr. Ivraine might very possibly know of some one wanting to meet with a person like him; therefore," continued Mr. Frazer, carefully selecting an unexceptionable sheet of highly glazed letter paper —he need not have been so particular if he had

only known the sort of place it was going to—putting the same before him, and commencing forthwith a wild irregular scrawl, which would have settled his chances for ever of promotion in a merchant's office, though, very possibly, it might have done well enough for a government one,—"therefore I am going to write to him."

Mina laid down the trifling piece of work she held in her hands, and watched her brother scribbling away in silence till he reached the bottom of the sheet; then, as he paused for a moment, she inquired,

"What has happened at Craigmaver that Colin can want to leave it."

"Why, little one, he says that he and the new mistress don't 'sort,' or, at least, he implies that fact; and, besides—but pshaw! there is the letter," he added, pulling a species of "whitey brown" epistle out of his pocket-book, and flinging it towards her, "read it, and understand it for yourself."

She lifted the missive, but did not open it for a minute.

"Well, Mina, on what other subject do you require information?" demanded her brother, noticing her eyes still fixed upon him.

"Nothing particular; only is there no other way you could get a place for poor Colin without troubling Mr. Ivraine?"

"No, there is not," he somewhat angrily retorted, "at least, none which appears so easy and altogether desirable. Mr. Ivraine made me promise that if I thought he could ever be of the slightest use to me, I would write to him at once; and I feel sure he will be able to procure something good for Colin; and, if you were not a little idiot, you would see he is a desirable acquaintance, and one I ought to endeavour not to lose sight of."

"If he do not write to you, Malcolm, I would not force myself on him," she timidly returned. "Remember how changed our position is, and——"

"If you do not cease lecturing and tormenting me, Mina, I shall have to cease talking to you at all; you have acquired so many ridiculous ideas—you are becoming so absurdly particular, so fastidious and provoking, that there is really scarcely any doing with you. You do not want to remain in London, because so much money is spent, and yet still you demur about going to Craigmaver to save; you implored me not to accept any favour from Alfred Westwood, even if he offered to assist me, and insinuated that it was mean to put myself

under an obligation to a person whom I considered beneath us in birth and station; and now you want me not to make a trifling request to a man who owes his life almost to me, and who exerted himself like a brother about our affairs, solely because my uncle died before leaving us what would have made us independent for life. The truth is, Mina, I do not understand you, and believe that disappointment at not being a great heiress has utterly soured your temper, never a particularly mild or contented one. There, there, don't begin to cry; it is a deuced hard thing a fellow cannot do what he likes, without being meddled with by a nonsensical girl, and that, when he does say what he thinks for once, he must be treated to an ocean of tears; but weep or not weep, Mina, I do repeat, you have tried me greatly, and that I really don't profess to have patience to bear such perpetual dictating, particularly from you, and I won't bear it, that 's more."

And Malcolm very determinedly turned over the sheet and went on with his letter, whilst Mina rose and quietly left the apartment, without answering him even by a look.

It was scarcely nine o'clock, but still she took a candle and ascended to her bedroom, where, sitting down before the dressing-table and, crossing her

arms upon it, she drooped her head on the support thus afforded, and remained in this position immovable for hours. She was not weeping now; she was thinking, with a racking pain in her temples and an oppression about her heart, of their almost hopeless prospects, of her mother's state of health, of her brother's unkind expressions, of some fruitless efforts of her own, of their present home, and the proposed journey northwards.

It was one of those periods when fifty things, all unpleasant, are thought of simultaneously; when there seems no hope in the future, no enjoyment in the present, no brightness in the past; when every disagreeable occurrence rises to the memory; when every pleasant reminiscence fades totally from the recollection; when all around, above, below, looks cloudy, stormy, unpromising; when the heart lacks courage to face the gathering tempest, and the soul wants faith to believe the sun will ever break through the darkness again; when there appears no good, no use, no happiness in anything; when the mind grows dangerously active in conjuring up phantoms wherewith to terrify itself; when life spreads out a huge blank page—blank, save for the word "unhappiness" written across it; when no succour can be discerned approaching from any

quarter; when, although the tired brain confesses there is "no use in thinking," it still persists in going on thinking and wearying itself to death.

The fit rarely lasts long, it is true; it produces no apparent injury, inflicts no permanent harm, therefore no one sympathises with these states of mental depression. They are hard to endure, for all that, however—so Mina felt; though, had any one asked her what had occurred particularly to annoy her, she could scarcely have answered the question in a satisfactory manner, still she was more thoroughly wretched as she sat there with her face concealed from view than she had ever been in her life before. The worst malady of the body is that for which doctors can discover no sufficient cause, which affects the patient he can hardly tell how; and, in like manner, any vague mental unhappiness is always more difficult to endure than the anguish arising from some decided misfortune.

The one can be grappled with and overcome, perhaps; at all events, it can be grappled with, being tangible, whilst the other flits about so as to elude the touch of the most skilful and experienced amongst those who make it their business to search out the secret griefs of the heart and eradicate them therefrom.

Men fight with men, but the bravest shrink appalled from the mere representation of that which reason assures them exists only in fancy—a ghost. I have known persons who would have walked without flinching up to the cannon's mouth, confess to having hesitated facing what, by the dim moonlight, bore the semblance of an apparition.

Well hath the secret sorrow of every home been styled a skeleton; if it were a living creature, possessed of flesh, bones, muscles, it would be speedily routed out of the citadel; as it is, no hand can be laid on it, no one can ever exactly say, "There it stands." It glides from room to room, steals into the soul and out of it again, skulks in the heart's dark corners, and defies the might of man to drive it from its stronghold.

But that mental depression produced by a variety of causes, which occasionally bows down the spirit, cannot last long; and thus, at length, the first bitterness of wounded feeling having past, the girl raised her head, and, pushing back the masses of long waving dark hair which, falling loose and unrestrained over her eyes, obscured her sight, she looked for an instant half dreamily at the candle burning dimly down into the socket, and then at

Colin Saunders' epistle that she had almost unconsciously retained in her hand.

It was indeed, inside and out, a unique missive; written on the coarsest of paper, with the thickest of pens, and the palest of ink, in a straight up-and-down crabbed hand; easy to read, however, notwithstanding, as the character — straightforward, honest, and simple—of him who indited it.

Scripture passages were somewhat strangely intermixed with details of what he was "fit for,"—the heavenly kingdom forming the burden of one passage, and the amount of temporal wages he would be "content with," being the intelligence conveyed in the next. The account of how his daughter Jenny, who married James Frith, the English butler, as Mr. Malcolm might recollect, was about returning to London and starting together with her husband (whose master had just died and left him four hundred pounds) a sort of boarding-house, was succeeded by reflections on the mutability of all earthly things and the importance of looking after the affairs of eternity. Then followed a pretty plain hint that Craigmaver was not what it used to be, and that the young laird's wife was too grand and fine to "put up with" humble bodies like himself; and the whole epistle wound up with request-

ing Malcolm to procure him a home among the "strangers," for that he could not think of serving any one in Scotland, except "one of the old clan."

After a cramp signature came a postscript, begging his dutiful remembrances to "Miss Mina," and hoping the mistress was better, and that Mr. Malcolm would excuse the liberty he had taken of writing to him and of getting the address off a letter the laird was sending to Miss Mina, and he said he should not have thought of troubling him about a poor man's business, had he not "been the son of his old master."

Tears, such as she had not shed for months previously, moistened the page as Mina read the quaint effusion Saunders had penned, after his day's work, in his little cottage at Craigmaver. What a change must have occurred there, to make him dream of leaving "the old place," Mina guessed; and where he could not stay she must go: she would never say another syllable against that or any other thing her brother chose to propose; she would try herself, silently and quietly, to avert the misfortunes she saw threatening on every side. There was one thing certain, her hopes whispered—Malcolm would not wish to remain in Scotland very long, and she resolved to do what she could before leaving Lon-

don, to see the result of her latest experiment, and to hold her peace about money matters and seem as patient as it was in her nature to seem. Perhaps her brother was right; she had tormented him a little too much: men, she always heard, did not like to be interfered with; but still she thought he had been rather unkind, and she wished, oh! so much, he had not written to Mr. Ivraine.

There was no help for it, however; she would never meddle with him again: and, after all, it was merely a folly on her part; why should he not correspond with any one he liked? it had nothing to do with her; it was altogether a matter of business. So she mused, looking at the expiring candle abstractedly, till it gave one long bright leap up into a flame, after which it died out altogether: then she crept to rest and soon, tired out, sank to slumber. It might have prevented her falling asleep quite so soon, had she known that, prompted by the spirit of opposition, her brother had inserted in his "business" despatch a clause to the effect that "his mother and Mina sent their kind remembrances to Mr. Ivraine."

But she did not know; and Malcolm had never heard what Mr. Westwood implied during the course of his final conversation with Mina. Per-

haps, if she had told him, he might not have written at all; but she did not like to repeat the words which stung her so bitterly at the time: so Malcolm, in ignorance, sealed up the letter, and Mina, in ignorance, slept tranquilly, and arose quite resigned about that matter, but to find her mother worse, to hear speedy change of air recommended by the doctors, to acquiesce in rapid arrangements for her removal by easy stages to the bracing Highland air, and finally to go away to Miss Caldera and tell her all about it.

"Oh! dear old friend," she said almost in despair, "we are to leave for Scotland almost immediately."

"Do you remember how glad you were at the prospect of a similar journey this time last year?" demanded the governess.

"I have learnt a great deal since then," answered the girl, sorrowfully.

"Lay it to heart," was the emphatic reply; "it may profit you much hereafter."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MOORS ONCE MORE.

When the laird of Craigmaver first wrote, inviting his relatives to his Highland home, of course he meant for them to stay at the place of his own actual abode; but Mina suggested, when she found her mother inclining to yield to Malcolm's desire for them to go and see their grand connexions, that if the cottage near the lake were vacant, it might be better for them to remain there, as Craigmaver proper was now always so crowded with company as to render it anything rather than a desirable house for an invalid, requiring occasionally perfect rest and total quietness: accordingly young Mrs. Frazer had the "wigwam," as she styled it, made habitable. She delighted the old laird by walking down with him every day to see that the workmen were doing their duty; she sent furniture from the "castle on

the hill" to the "cottage in the vale;" she assisted with her own fair hands in the arrangement of draperies; had the garden "done up" under her especial *surveillance*; went almost crazy on the subject of well-aired beds and rousing fires; and declared to her husband's grandfather that she would do anything in the world to make his "dear little niece and her mother comfortable."

And he whom woman had never blinded before, was deceived by her, and he humbly thanked God for the great comfort He had granted to be the pride and blessing of his declining days; and he trusted Allan, when he grew a little older, and became tired of the world's flatteries and vanities, would learn to appreciate her in time also; for surely, thought the old man, "there never existed so almost faultless a creature as Cecilia."

Who, having tact enough to perceive that so long as she possessed his grandfather's ear she retained a strong hold on her husband, had devoted herself to the old man, with something more than the affection of a daughter, ever since, standing with his grey head uncovered on the threshold of that beautiful home, he welcomed her lovingly to it. She brought sunshine with her to his soul; he felt lonely if she left him for a few days; he thought every one must

be wrong excepting herself: there was a charm about her which captivated his very soul.

Mrs. Frazer looked with perfect wonder on the lovely being who greeted her with such tenderness in the lonely romantic spot.

Standing at the cottage door, the sun beaming on her hair, and turning each tress into a lock of gold, her purple eyes soft and sympathising, her features perfect as those of a statue, her colour a little heightened, and her voice more musical than ever, what wonder if the exhausted invalid thought her more an angel than a woman; what marvel if she felt proud to hear her greet Mina as a sister, and to see her kiss the girl over and over again.

How kind she felt it of her to stay and pour tea out for her, and make her lie down on a sofa, the pillows and cushions of which she arranged with a skilful hand, and remain coaxing her to eat, though she said they were going to have a large dinner party at seven o'clock, and that she should scarcely have time to dress for it.

"I must go, I fear," at last she said; "and I am so sorry, but we could not avoid having these people, as Lord Cintra and Lady Matilda leave us to-morrow; but I shall be down first thing in the morning to see how you have slept. Mina, make

your mamma go to bed immediately: I mean to take the entire management of you both, and to bring back a colour into your cheeks: but now I must really be off,—see, it is more than half-past six;" and she darted out of the house and up the hill with the speed and gracefulness of a fawn. Malcolm Frazer said she was the only woman he had ever seen who could run gracefully; but then once, after she had regained her dominion over him, Mina heard him affirm that his cousin Cecilia — as she insisted on their calling her — could bring "creeping on all fours" into fashion if she chose; there was nothing she could not do, nothing.

And, accordingly, she laid herself out to cure Mrs. Frazer, took her drives in the tiniest of pony phaetons, exhausted even the invention of a French *chef* to concoct tempting dishes for her; got the doctor to say "donkey exercise" would be most beneficial, and procured one of the tribe "that would go" over from Locholen, and walked miles across the moors, sometimes leading the beast by the bridle, sometimes sauntering gaily along by Mrs. Frazer's side, singing snatches of wild mountain songs to amuse the invalid; then she had cushions laid down in the pleasure-boat, because

she felt sure the breeze on the lake would revive her; she almost went distracted one day when she found Mina had permitted her parent to stand for two minutes in a draught; she insisted on writing to an old Edinburgh doctor, a great friend of her father, and asking him to come and stay at Craigmaver, with a view to learning his opinion of what was the exact nature of Mrs. Frazer's malady; she nursed and petted the lady for months; and at last, by dint of almost superhuman exertions, she had her—before the golden glory of summer was half expended—almost well again.

Then came, however, a slight change: it was hardly perceptible; it was a thing to be felt, not seen—a sort of occasional superciliousness—an assumption in the presence of strangers, and, in the absence of her husband and the laird—a half patronizing air, which wounded Mina to the very soul: there was a gradual falling away in her affection for the trio—Malcolm, perhaps, who was handsome, and flattered her, alone excepted; a little touch of sarcasm mingled at times in her discourse; fresh visitors came in flocks to Craigmaver, and, of course, it was impossible for her always to be attending to, and studying the wishes of, her husband's relations. Mina knew they had been too long there, but Mal-

colm would not move; the gay life, the grand society, the perpetual excitement suited him; so she said nothing, but bore—she knew how much—"patiently and silently."

It was one balmy day in July that Cecilia glided into the parlour of the cottage. Allan and she and one or two others were going out on the lake, and they wanted to know if Mina and Mrs. Frazer would not join them; she said it in her old bright frank manner, for her husband had told her to make them come, and she wanted to please him; but her eye had wandered round the room, and in one corner she spied what caused the angry blood to colour her cheek, though she took no notice of the discovery at the time, and so prayed and begged and beseeched them to join the boating party, that Mrs. Frazer, after vainly urging a slight cold as an apology, felt constrained to rise and put on her bonnet, and desire Mina to do the same.

"Oh! never mind a bonnet, never mind anything but the straw hat, Mina, and your scarf," said Cecilia, "the day is so warm, you will be baked;" and accordingly she commenced tying on the hat in question, and flung the tartan scarf about the girl's shoulders, exclaiming, "There, that will do beautifully! I see," she added the next minute, in a

quick light tone, as Mrs. Frazer left the room, "I see you have got a new guitar."

"Yes, Allan brought it me from Edinburgh," answered Mina, simply; "it has such a sweet tone, have you tried it yet?"

"Tried it yet!" repeated Cecilia; "no, indeed, how should I?"

"Will you play something on it now, while mamma is getting ready?" said Mina.

"Another time, *ma chére*," said the lady; "I did not know it was the fashion for married gentlemen to give presents: when did it come out, Mina—you, who are from London and have seen more of the world than I, must be better informed—when did it come out?"

"What do you mean, Cecilia?" demanded Mina; "though Allan is married, he is still my cousin, is not he? I really never thought——"

"No, no, I know you did not," sneered the other, "and neither did he—of his wife; I wish he would buy *me* a new one."

"Take that, do," cried Mina eagerly; "I do not want it at all, I told him so; I never could learn to play well, and indeed it is of little or no use to me: do please take it."

"It was from him, not you, I wanted a present,"

said Cecilia coldly; "but here is Mrs. Frazer, let us be gone," and she turned with a bright smile to meet the lady, and they all walked down together to the landing stage near the boat house, where the visitors, with Allan and Malcolm, were already standing.

It was a close sultry day; there was not a leaf stirring, there was scarce a ripple on the waters, the song of the birds was hushed, there was a dead stillness, a suffocating closeness in the air,—so Allan remarked when they had got some distance from shore.

"I fear there will be a thunder storm before very long, sir," remarked one of the rowers, wiping the perspiration from his forehead with the back of a horny hand.

"So do I," returned Allan, glancing anxiously up at the darkening sky; "I think we had better return."

"Now, Allan, do not be tiresome," expostulated Cecilia; "when it is threatening, you will not venture out at all, and when it is fine, you immediately want to return; as we have got so far, do let us go on."

"It is only on account of Mrs. Frazer," said Allan; but a "Pray don't mind me," from that

lady, settling the question, they proceeded a considerable distance further, till at length Allan again exclaimed,

"Well, really I think we had better return; there is no pleasure in getting wet, and——" his eye fell on the thin dresses of the widow and her daughter, which glance decided Cecilia's answer.

"And there is no pleasure in always anticipating evil, and the day is so delightful; we shall never have a finer, if we wait for a year."

She had barely concluded ere a flash of lightning, succeeded by a deafening peal of thunder, announced that the storm had commenced. The rowers instantly turned the boat's course homewards and pulled with might and main. Cloaks and shawls, which had, unfortunately, been provided in the very scantiest quantities, were produced and adjusted with anxious care, but all in vain; the tempest swept down upon them with relentless fury; the men found it difficult to make "headway;" the rain poured in torrents on the devoted heads of those who had gone out on a party of pleasure; the wind whistled, the thunder roared, the lightning gleamed: it was, in fact, a terrible mountain storm, more violent than enduring, and so, ere long, it went rushing over the hills to seek some other spot

whereon to expend the remnants of its fury, and left the boat and its occupants, unswamped, it is true, but thoroughly drenched, as people only can be in some lonely spot in the lonely Highlands, or else on the bosom of the waters, far from human shelter, far from human habitation.

Nothing could exceed Cecilia's grief on this occasion; she said she was quite distracted with anxiety about Mina's poor mother; she would not let her return to the cottage, when they had at length regained *terra firma*, declaring Craigmaver was nearer. Before changing her own garments, she insisted on seeing Mrs. Frazer in bed, with a glowing fire in her room, warm bottles at her feet, and every other precaution taken to avert the injurious consequences of a chill. She made Mina put on some clothes of hers, and persisted in forcing her to wrap shawls and cloaks about her till the girl thought she should be fairly suffocated; she sent a servant galloping off for the nearest doctor, with a full statement of events and a request for the learned gentleman to bring something with him likely to cure Mrs. Frazer, supposing she became ill after such an exposure. She was solicitous about all her guests, but she lavished any amount of attention on Mina and her mother: there was no end to

her kindness; and when Mrs. Frazer, the following day, was able to come down in time for luncheon, it might have been imagined that some incredible piece of good fortune had occurred to render Cecilia so joyous, light-hearted, and happy.

Then she would not hear of a return to the cottage for a day or two; she wished to make certain of the completeness of the recovery, before letting Mrs. Frazer out of her sight.

She could not trust Mina, she said, and hurt Mina by saying so; but the words were spoken in such a kind, cordial manner, that nobody, save one inclined to fault finding, could have quarrelled with them; and so she did keep the widow for a couple of days, to be quite exhausted with the eternal bustle of visitors, and wearied with the sight of gaiety and fashion and society, which she had no longer health or spirits to enjoy.

The third morning there were to be grand races some five miles off, whither all the household, excepting Mina, her mother, and a few servants, proceeded. Cecilia had implored her "little cousin" to be good natured and leave her mother, who was now so much better, under the charge of an exemplary lady's maid, but Mina was firm; she did not care for the races, and she did for her mother, where-

fore she resisted all entreaties, and for once successfully.

As she and her parent stood at the window watching the departure of the gay cavalcade, it seemed as if a sudden feeling of affection for her daughter and consideration for her situation came into the widow's breast; previously, Malcolm had been all in all to her—the idol of her soul, the being for whose welfare no sacrifice could be considered too great, whose word was law, whose lightest wish must be fulfilled; but now, even while she smiled in answer to his proud, happy glance, her eyes turned from his face to the pale countenance of her who, with less ostentation and less skill than Cecilia, had nursed and tended her with untiring devotion, with silent, earnest care. She knew that for nights the girl never left her bedside, that she was there ready to listen to her smallest request, to comply with her lightest demand. Because Mina had never made a "fuss," she had never imagined she was doing anything; but, at that moment, the whole state of the case burst upon her, and, for the first time in her life, she inquired, almost tenderly,

"Mina, should you not like to go too?"

"No, indeed, mamma, I had far rather stay with you."

There was no other word spoken, but they both bent their eyes steadily on the group of happy faces clustered below—on the carriage containing the Laird of Craigmaver and some of the visitors—on Allan's melancholy face—on Malcolm's frank happy countenance and bold careless bearing—on the lady of the mansion, with her blue cloth riding-habit, her long hair half veiling her figure, her graceful easy seat, and lively demeanour. They all smiled and bowed to the two they left behind as they departed; and when the train had entirely swept out of sight, when the last flutter of Cecilia's feather disappeared from view, when nothing remained within their range of vision but the silent hills and the lonely mountains, and the dark, quiet, mournful fir trees, the widow turned sadly from the window with a deep involuntary sigh.

"Mina," she said, after a pause, "I think I will go home; so much company and excitement tires me."

And the girl forthwith led her silently back to the cottage. When they arrived there, she spoke again.

"I should like to go to bed, dear; I do not feel very well."

Mina did not know why a sort of chill crept to

her heart when she heard these words; but a kind of presentiment of coming evil oppressed her. There was no doctor nearer than four miles; but as soon as she had assisted her mother to undress, she despatched a bare-legged Highland lad, who was weeding in the garden, to summon him.

It was hours before the boy returned: he said they told him the doctor was gone to the races, and he had followed him there, but could hear no tidings of him; he had searched high and low, but was not able to see him.

"And did you not speak to my uncle? you must surely have seen him," exclaimed Mina.

"Yes, I saw him; but there was such a gathering of great folks about the place where he and Mr. Allan and the young leddy were, I could not get word wi' them; however, I met Mr. Thomas, the new footman, and I bid him tell the laird and look out for the doctor, and he said he would, Miss, so I came home."

After he had stayed an hour watching the horses, he might have added, but he did not; and it would have done Mina no good if he had. She stole back to her mother's room, listening eagerly for the footsteps of one who never again came there—in time.

At length, as evening was approaching, a rapid sound of horses' hoofs smote on her ear.

"It must be he, at last," she said; "oh! thank God for it!" and she went out to the hall door to meet him.

A man was coming down the hill at a furious pace: it was not he, nor Malcolm, but Allan Frazer.

"What is the matter, Mina?" he exclaimed, springing from the saddle.

"I don't know," she said? "where is the doctor, and where in the world is Malcolm?"

"He and the rest had set out for Locholen before that fellow delivered the message to me," returned Allan; "I despatched a groom after him, however, and he will be here immediately: nobody seems to know anything about the doctor, but I have sent to the market town for another. What is it, Mina? tell me, child; what is it?"

"Death," she responded in a quivering voice, hope having died out at the sound of his words, "death! oh! cousin Allan, come in and tell me if it is not so; for pity's sake don't leave me, I cannot face it myself."

He flung the bridle hastily to the gaping lad and entered the house; something else entered it with him, flitted by him in the hall, rushed into the sick

chamber and close up to the bedside before he could reach it.

Not before Mina, however, with a wild cry, had flung herself into her mother's outstretched arms.

"God bless you, child," she cried, in a voice which rang in Allan's ears like the sound of a passing bell: "you have been a good, good child to me. God bless you for it! be a fond sister to Malcolm."

"Oh! mother, stay," gasped out the girl; "mother! I have nobody else on earth."

Ere the sentence was quite concluded, she had not her on earth either, for the woman, who was just beginning to feel such affection for her daughter as might have made life happier to them both, fell back, with a heavy sob, into the arms of the invisible spectre, which had made such cruel speed to receive her.

Mina never knew what occurred between that moment and another, when she awoke to the knowledge of passing events and a consciousness of the great trial which had befallen her. She had a confused recollection of some fresh arrivals, of hearing Malcolm's voice, of seeing Cecilia leading him out of the room, of a harsh Highland accent she recognized as the doctor's, of words of kindness spoken by Allan Frazer and some strangers, of driving

through the stillness of night to Craigmaver, and being left alone with her dear old uncle there. She spent two or three days in a sort of miserable dream, and then she came fully to comprehend it all: how they were totally orphans, how her mother was dead and buried, how they had no home, or shadow of one, left, and how she and her brother were residing on sufferance in their uncle's house—beautiful Craigmaver — under the same roof with Cecilia Frazer, General Warmond's lovely daughter.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WOMAN'S WEAPONS.

"MAN is to man the sorest, surest ill." So said one who encountered many trials, felt the sting of poverty, endured the sorrows of life, knew the bitterness of remorse, and died with his genius only half-recognised—only half-developed: but if he had only been treated to a sight of the bad side of that sex, every member of which, if pretty or accomplished or amiable or graceful, he idealised into angels—he would surely have recanted, and declared that though man can give all sorts of annoyance to his fellow, beggar him, imprison him, torture and mutilate his frame, degrade him into something similar to, if not quite, a beast, all the sorrow and irritation he is capable of producing fade into total insignificance, when compared with the agony woman can inflict on woman.

Heaven only knows how they do it, for the adepts in the art of feminine persecution keep the *modus operandi* a profound secret from the lords of the creation and the uninitiated of their own sex; like the mysteries of freemasonry, which everybody sees and hears of, and nobody (save the brethren) understands, the thing is perpetually being practised, and yet, unless it comes into the world with people, they cannot learn the knack. There are some poisons so subtle and insidious, that their presence can only be detected by their deadly consequences; and, in similar manner, the little venomed darts female tongues are capable of flinging at some innocent victim, can only be traced by the wounds they inflict. The result is produced—that is evident to the most careless and unsensitive; but how? oh! that is quite another question—entirely beyond me to explain. Cecilia Warmond could have told had she liked; but then, being one of the patentees, so to speak, of the cruel invention, she kept the means in the background; permitted no eye, save her own, to see the peculiarly delicate verbal mechanism which possessed the rare power of clothing deformity with beauty, concealing a thorn with a rose, presenting some dreadful potion in the semblance of a tempting draught, shrouding a sneer as a compli-

ment, sending forth a falsehood under the simple disguise of truth.

The Pope who infused poison into the blood of his victim, under pretence of clasping his hand with cordial friendship, would surely have out-Heroded Herod in subtlety of deceit and fertility of expedients had he been a woman instead of a Pope. If it had pleased fate to change his sex and position, and transfer him from the Vatican to some French chateau or gorgeous palace, to give him flowing locks, a beardless chin, a soft yielding feminine manner, and a portion of woman's exhaustless tact and alarming rapidity of invention—if fate had unhappily done all this, I say, surely the noble art of mental scorpion-scourging would, centuries ago, have been pronounced incapable of further improvements: ladies must have been content thenceforth to walk in the old-beaten track, and follow, in humble admiration, the footsteps of their great predecessor.

But he was only a Pope; so, finding himself impotent to wound the minds of his victims, he contented himself with killing their bodies: he paused, unwillingly, at a fixed point, beyond which none but women's feet have ever passed; it is the unenviable distinction of Eve's daughters that some

if vanquished, people saw how it was done; she had, at least, the comfort of knowing against what and whom she was fighting, but in Cecilia's guerilla practice, she was a complete novice; it was a style of thing she had never been accustomed to: she could not tell from behind what curious intellectual ambush the shot was fired, in what secure nook the enemy found refuge, what sort of armour would suffice to shield her from injury, what species of weapon might prove serviceable in defence. She was fairly bewildered and stood stupidly passive, while the shafts, unseen by other eyes, winged their unerring course towards her, always lodging, no matter how swift the aim or unpromising the ground, right in the spot intended, where they remained quivering for days after.

It was the bitterest ordeal, Mina fancied, she could ever be called upon to pass through. When Allan was at home, indeed, things were more endurable; but then he very rarely was at home, and Cecilia had so completely gained the old laird's affections, that she could almost have persuaded him white was black, and accordingly she did induce him to believe there had been a something rather defective in dear Mina's training, something which considerably detracted from her numerous virtues,

something which did not make her friends less fond of her, but only caused them to feel a little anxious and uneasy concerning her future welfare.

"If she had been brought up at Craigmaver, under your watchful tender care," insinuated the lady; and this being an embodiment of Mr. Frazer's own idea, he sighed, and Cecilia sighed, and the old laird wished his "little girl" were more like his "dear daughter."

"She falls far short of that," he once said, sadly; but then added—his old love for the child of his dead nephew gushing up again in his soul, clear and bright, notwithstanding all the rubbish Cecilia had so perseveringly thrown on the top of it—"but she is a dear, good, quiet little creature, notwithstanding, and I wish—I wish we could do anything for her; her fate has been a very unfortunate one, Cecilia."

What was "to be done" with her had been, indeed, a very vexed question in Mrs. Frazer's mind for a considerable period; to keep her as a Craigmaver fixture she was resolved she would not; but then where could she be transported to, unless Malcolm grew discontented with his quarters and turned his attention towards seeking some settled lucrative employment. Cecilia therefore resolved, contrary

to her usual custom—for she was generally as considerate towards gentlemen as the reverse towards ladies—to make Craigmaver anything rather than a pleasant abiding place for him; but, before she had time to carry her benevolent intention fully into effect, or had leisure to do more than just surprise him on one or two occasions, a circumstance occurred which induced her to consider such a line of conduct unnecessary, and to believe there were other means by which Mina might be got rid of.

"Cecilia," said the laird one fine autumnal morning as they sauntered round the garden together, "Cecilia, read that letter and give me your opinion: what ought we to do?"

Mrs. Frazer took the missive in her slender fingers and glanced over it in her usual rapid manner. It was dated from a fashionable Edinburgh hotel; it was penned on the thickest and best of paper; it was written in a firm gentlemanlike hand; it contained plausible words and plenty of them: from "Dear sir" to "Yours, faithfully." Cecilia comprehended every syllable, and, almost before she had taken in the signature, she exclaimed,

"Oh! let us have him here, by all means."

"Do you mean, ask him to Craigmaver?" demanded the laird, a little doubtfully.

"*Oui, vraiment,*" she answered; "he will be enchanted with our Highland scenery: having an object in view, he cannot be bored with our lonely situation; then you will be able to judge of him for yourself. I think it a most frank and straightforward epistle."

"But Mina——"

"Oh! when you have invited him, it will be time enough to tell her. You see it is evident there has been a coolness, or something of that kind, between them; it is better not to ask her at all about the matter, but just let us see what he is like, and, if you approve of him, permit affairs to take their own course. After you have answered this letter, I will break the subject to her: it would be such a desirable match, such an opening for poor Malcolm, such a comfortable home for dear Mina, darling child; how glad I should be for her to be happily settled—as I am," she ingenuously added, taking the old laird's hand and pressing it. "Do let us have him here; not exactly as an accepted suitor, you understand, dear papa (Cecilia always ignored the grandfather), but as the Londoners—the milliners, I mean—say about their goods, on approbation; if he do not suit, we can render his visit agreeable and send him away again; but if, *au contraire*——"

The lady did not finish the sentence, but looked so perfectly beautiful and graceful, standing among the flowers of the garden, that the old laird never thought of uttering another syllable in the way of dissent; and Cecilia "kept up the steam" by harping on about how pleased she was and how she hoped he was as nice as his letter, and how she had always thought it would be a "desirable thing" for Mina long before her uncle's death, when they used to be talking of him at Glenfiord, and how she felt, even then, that the "little silly thing" was suffering some strange prejudice to blind her.

In short, Cecilia got the all-important letter of invitation written, for which Mr. Alfred Westwood's soul had yearned, which he read and smiled over and then sneered at, in his usual polite manner, while sitting in one of the best apartments of the best Edinburgh hotel.

It was a lovely trait in the character of Mr. Westwood, as it is in the characters of many individuals, that "the more he could not get a thing, the more he wished for it;" he hated to be what he, in city phrase, termed, "done:" and to be rejected by a woman, to have "No," said once, twice, thrice, to him by a little contemptible girl, whom he had seen grow up under his very eyes,—the thing was not to

be borne. He would master her yet, he vowed, and, as he himself said, he had never yet broken a vow, save one.

What that one was, he knew, but, though it concerned the Frazers considerably, they did not, and he by no means intended to enlighten them. He wanted to marry Mina Frazer for three reasons: first, because she disliked him and had seen through and scorned him; second, because he did feel something near akin to love for her,—not love, not strong affection—he was incapable of that—but a little admiration, a very sufficient fancy; third, because he should be marrying into a good connexion: with Mina's family and his own fortune, they might have almost any society they chose. He meant to retire from business in a little while, buy an estate, become a country gentleman, and talk of his Scottish relatives who lived at Craigmaver and were next neighbours to the Earl of Lobenclu.

He had taken ample time to reflect about the matter; he had made many and secret inquiries, not merely concerning the Highland establishment, the members composing it, and the visitors who flocked to it, but also about the very servants and labourers. He had got a little information anent Ernest Ivraine and his prospects. Money, we all know, can open

the gate of every home, save heaven, and place the curious in possession of the secrets of all households; so, fortified by a vast amount of apparently unnecessary knowledge, encouraged by the fact of Mrs. Frazer's demise, Malcolm's continued inaction, and Mina's peculiar position; satisfied, in brief, that he was "doing the right thing at the right time," Alfred Westwood penned a long and artful letter to Mr. Frazer, senior, setting forth his earnest affection for his niece, confessing she had, at one time, seemed not very much inclined towards him, but venturing a hope that *now* she might perhaps view him in a rather more favourable light. Then he entered into a detail of pecuniary and other matters; told all he could do for Mr. Malcolm Frazer; said that, although disparity of years certainly did exist, he hoped intensity of affection might melt that obstacle away; frankly confessed that, in point of family, he could advance no claim, save that of respectability; and wound up by requesting to know if the Laird of Craigmaver would permit him to renew, with his sanction, his addresses to his niece.

This was the letter Cecilia read and decided should be politely answered, as we have seen.

"Mina," she said to that much enduring young

lady the day previous to that on which Mr. Westwood had said he should arrive, "Mina, an old friend of yours is to be here to-morrow."

"An old friend of mine!" echoed Mina; "who may that be?"

"Why could you not have said, 'who may *he* be?' at once and saved me the trouble of correcting your form of speech?" demanded Cecilia in a kinder and livelier tone than usual, watching to see the effect her words produced.

"He!" ejaculated Mina; "he!"

"How you say it," laughed the lady, "and how you blush, and how frightened you look; but he is not an ogre, darling—this same Mr. Alfred Westwood—rest assured of that."

"Alfred Westwood! Oh! Cecilia, this is your doing," cried Mina passionately; "but I tell you this much, I have borne a great deal from you, I have kept silence when my heart has been breaking, I have never said I was unhappy, though often and often I have wished to be lying beside my dead mother, out of the way of annoyance and humiliation: but stay in the house with Mr. Westwood, I will not."

"Take it quietly, *ma mignonne*," sneered Cecilia; "don't distort your pretty face nor injure your

lungs with such excessive loudness of enunciation, I entreat."

"Do not madden me, Cecilia," burst in Mina; "you have no feeling, you have no heart, you are not like a woman. Oh! if I had known you once as I know you now——"

"Well, dear, what should you have done?" demanded her tormentor.

"Nothing that I have done,—nothing; but I am resolved about this, and I shall go at once to my uncle and tell him that, if Mr. Westwood come here, I go."

"Surely you could never dream of depriving us of the immense advantage of your society," said the other; "but supposing you are so cruel, where should you go?"

"As far as possible from you," retorted Mina, with quivering nostrils, feeling her own impotency, yet unable to restrain the expression of her anger any longer; "if I only knew a spot on the earth on which you had ever set your foot, I would avoid it as I might a pestilence."

"You are an ungrateful little virago," said Cecilia, laughing as one might at the fury of a wayward child; "such a storm about nothing."

"It may be nothing to you, but it is much to

me," answered Mina; "but I will not talk any more to you, I will go to my uncle:" and before Cecilia had fully made up her mind whether to prevent her executing her purpose, or to spur her on to accomplish it, Mina settled the question by darting out of the drawing-room, where the brief dialogue had taken place, and rushing, *sans ceremonie*, into the opposite apartment, where Malcolm, Allan, and the laird were just about thinking of leaving the decanters of prime old wine, and sauntering in to join "the ladies:"—there she went.

"I have come, uncle," she began, "to tell you that, if it be true Mr. Westwood is coming here to-morrow, I should like to leave Craigmaver to-night. I know perfectly well what brings him; I understand it all. I cannot stay to meet him again: I will not do it."

"He is only coming here as a visitor—as an invited guest, Mina," commenced the laird, but his niece interrupted him with,

"He is coming here to strive to make me marry him, and I won't. He offered, in the first shock of our beggary, to wring an annuity for mamma and a commission for Malcolm out of Mrs. Merapie, if I only would be his wife, and I said 'no' then: is it likely, when *she* is dead, I would

say 'yes' now? I told him always I would not—always; and the last time we parted we had a sort of quarrel, and——"

A perfect storm of reproaches here burst forth on Mina's head,—almost invectives from her brother, remonstrances from the laird, wondering expressions from Cecilia: she had, so they affirmed, blighted her brother's prospects; sacrificed her mother to her own extraordinary prejudices; maintained a secresy and reserve reprehensible in the highest degree; treated a high-minded man with a contempt and unkindness for which no words of condemnation were sufficiently strong: she had exhibited a degree of perverseness, of which they had believed her incapable, and permitted herself to give way to a fit of passion that was really alarming: in fact, there was no sin in the catalogue she had not committed. And truly, standing amongst them—her face flushed, her frame trembling, her manner excited—she did look like one who, though she knew herself to be in the wrong, was determined to persevere therein, urged forward by a bold defiant obstinate spirit.

Cecilia Warmond was one who would have sown doubt and distrust between the nearest of friends, the most unsuspicious of relatives: she had contrived to

loosen the tie which bound the old laird to his niece; she had managed to lessen whatever love Malcolm ever possessed for his sister; she was a worm in the heart of that heaven-born blossom—domestic affection—gnawing and gnawing away for ever, eating the good and beauty out of the flower by imperceptible degrees: how she enjoyed that scene she knew—how she kept heaping fuel on the fire Mina felt. But at length the crisis of the affair was produced by Malcolm vehemently exclaiming,

"Why did you never hint before that an accommodation with Mrs. Merapie was possible; that Mr. Westwood had offered to be mediator in the matter; that there was any hope held out for me; that there was a possibility of procuring a handsome competence for our mother? Mina, I could not have believed you capable of such deceit—such secresy—such——"

"You all want to be rid of me," sobbed Mina, bursting into a passion of tears; "there is not one in the world who cares for me—not one. Oh! father," she cried, lifting her hands with a wild despairing gesture, "if I only could have gone with you *then!*"

She ran hurriedly out of the apartment and up the stairs, seeking some quiet place to weep in solitude.

"Mina, child, come and tell me all about it," said Mr. Allan Frazer—who had left the dining-room at the commencement of the argument with a black cloud on his brow, stopping her in her rapid career —"what is it my little cousin? speak to me, Mina."

"No, no, Allan Frazer, I do not want to speak to you again ever," she cried, breaking away from him; and turning down the stairs, again she quitted the house, and went wandering through the gardens—wandering and weeping—till the old laird, who loved her, as he said, in spite of her faults, sought and found his little girl, and talked to her, as he might have done years and years ago at Glenfiord.

But Mina was a child no longer, and he had ceased to be the uncle of former days; it was not that the truth and honesty and sincerity of his heart had been impaired—that they were ever likely to be impaired—that his sterling goodness and the straightforwardness of his guileless purpose were capable of variation; no—but Cecilia had stepped between them. He believed her immaculate; a paragon amongst females; a being who was free from any sin, save that original taint transmitted to her by Mother Eve; and Mina could not accuse her to him; she could not tell him what she thought of his grandson's wife; she could not clear herself by

blaming that faultless creature; she could not say, "Uncle, you are deceived; you are nursing a scorpion, which has stung me, which may sting you." Cecilia was perpetually between them,—dogged their footsteps, checked the impulses of their hearts, made them reserved, distant, uncommunicative; and, accordingly, the interview terminated—as such interviews frequently do — in dissatisfaction to both. Mina listened to him—that was all; not in the frank, confiding, trustful spirit of former days, but as to one whom an enemy was prompting on to torment her; and she answered, so he thought, waywardly and unreasonably and selfishly; and, though Mina became calm, and he kind, yet there was a gloom on the countenances of both, a shadow on the hearts of uncle and niece, when, after a long, painful, useless interview, they re-entered the house together.

The next day Allan Frazer went to Edinburgh, and Mr. Alfred Westwood arrived at Craigmaver from it; and, though there was a cold, sullen, settled aversion visible in Mina's manner towards him, he felt, on the whole, perfectly satisfied with his reception. It had been very easy for Mina to say she would go; but as she had no place to go to, no one to go with, she was forced to remain—to be

looked on as a person in disgrace by the household generally, to note how Mr. Westwood ingratiated himself more and more each day with her uncle, how fascinating Cecilia made herself to him, how captivated he seemed by her. She noted all in silence; she never spoke when it was possible to avoid doing so; but she thought, till her brain whirled and her head ached and her heart sickened —of what she was to do—of where she was to go, for she saw Craigmaver was never destined to be a happy home for her, and she knew there was no other open but one that she could not accept—from the very mention of which she desired to flee. Mr. Westwood progressed not at all in his wooing; and Malcolm speedily found himself, as he expressed it, "thrust to the wall" by bright beautiful Cecilia, who, under pretence of rendering Alfred Westwood's visit "agreeable" to him, contrived to make herself eminently so.

But he saw through her: for about the first time in her life the general's daughter encountered an individual, who, in depth of character, in power of dissimulation, in cleverness, heartlessness, and hypocrisy, was more than a match for her; who could walk in and out of her magic circle unharmed; who could flutter near the flame and not be scorched;

who could admire, and still despise—flatter, and secretly sneer; who acknowledged her to be the most beautiful and captivating amongst women, even whilst he laughed inwardly at her for being only a woman — a very vain, very unamiable, very treacherous, dangerous woman. He did not hate, or dread, or avoid her: he amused himself with complimenting her; with making her imagine he, like all the rest of the world, considered her a sort of divinity,—by watching every turn and twist and wind of her deceitful nature: he listened quietly when she delicately implied—scarcely hinted—one day, when conversing about Mina's perverseness, "that she was not quite worthy of him;" he pretended to believe her when she said she "loved her cousin like a sister;" he declared no mortal woman ever sung as she sung; he admired her and everything she did, and administered small doses of flattery so judiciously, that his words sounded more like solemn truths than specious falsehoods; he completely blinded her and the laird; and, at first, almost succeeded in bringing round Malcolm, but did away with the effect of that by "taking the patron on him too soon," and also by covertly assisting Cecilia to sneer at the brother, to the end that he—finding in what a position poverty placed

them both—might urge on Mina to accept her suitor; for Mrs. Frazer wanted the girl to marry Mr. Westwood, and she wanted Mr. Westwood to admire her.

She desired to be rid of Mina, to have a bone of silent contention removed from betwixt her husband and self; to have no female to divide the palace of Craigmaver with her; to have done with an insignificant little intruder whom Allan would not let her make a slave of: and, as she could not perceive any other "eligible opening," she wished to send her off under charge of Mr. Westwood, and to send Mr. Westwood off, firmly believing there never was, on the face of this round earth, so completely fascinating, accomplished, beautiful a creature as Mrs. Allan Frazer, who had witched away his heart from him, and left not even an atom thereof to be ever after possessed by Mina.

It is difficult to describe such a character; almost impossible to tell by what means she tried to effect her object. It sounds paradoxical to say she coquetted with a man for whom she did not care one straw; whom she could not have married, even if she had; whom she would not have wedded had she been single: it is hard to convey in words an exact idea of the results, a mixture of inconsistency,

vanity, heartlessness, frivolity, and cleverness may produce. Perhaps, reader, you have happened to meet with such an one in your pilgrimage through life,—a woman, and yet not a woman; an angel in outward form, a syren, an enchantress, who spent her life in trying to make other people unhappy, who cared for little save admiration, who strove to win hearts for the purpose of breaking them, and who was, to sum up all into one brief sentence, as Malcolm Frazer once stated, "the most confounded flirt that ever existed."

If you have not, no description could make you deem Cecilia's character otherwise than a fictitious one; if you have, then you can understand how it came to pass that Alfred Westwood, seeing down into her—reading the trumpery matter enclosed in such magnificent binding,—tracing every thought, feeling, wish—preserved his heart perfectly uninjured, spite of the blaze of attractions to which it was perpetually exposed; and found himself growing each day a little fonder of the girl who would not care for him, and who, let her have what other faults she might—let her be, in other respects, black as Erebus—was innocent as a lamb of having ever, even once in her life, thought of what Allan Frazer stigmatized, and justly, as a horrid word

—flirting. But all would not do: Mina was quiet, but she was also determined; and when matters became unendurable at Craigmaver, she left it by means and in manner following.

CHAPTER XIV.

MINA TRIUMPHANT.

THERE never existed under the canopy of heaven so careless, unsatisfactory, incomprehensible a being as Malcolm Frazer; such an indolent, pleasure-seeking, easily ruffled, easily appeased, vain, self-sufficient, good-natured, hard to be angry with, creature as Mina's brother, who, having been cut out by nature for a useless, dandified "man about town," took it exceedingly hard to be kicked by fate from post to pillar; to be told he ought to exert himself; to have, in one brief word, to do any single thing but what he liked himself; to hear any solitary remark that was not precisely such as suited his taste. He combined the faults of a man with the absurdities of a child; he would catch at a straw to-day, and then turn round and be angry with the person who had flung it in his way, to-morrow. Misfortune had taught him nothing but

irritability; the necessity for firmness only made him vacillating; he had no fixed principle of action, no aim nor object in life; he never seemed to have properly developed, he never seemed likely to develope; he had, owing to some peculiarity in his mental construction, grown older in years, but not in sense; bodily, he was not, perhaps, quite so young as formerly, but in mind he never aged; he remained a boy, and he looked a man: his resentment was not worth dreading, his friendship not worth having; any one who could give him what he liked, flatter his vanity, humour his weaknesses, was the best creature in the world at the time; whosoever annoyed him, crossed his whim, or told him an unpalatable truth, was his enemy for the time: he had become perfectly good for nothing since his uncle's death; the unrestrained liberty, the wild free existence, the unlimited command of money he had enjoyed during his mother's life-time, had utterly ruined him for any settled regular employment; he possessed talents which were never used, energies he never exerted, feelings that never were aroused: it depended on future events whether he should remain for ever the same useless and desperately simple—ready to believe and hope anything, willing to be turned from or to any purpose,

anxious to be benefited by any one—sort of youth he actually was,—when one day Mina, forgetful of her former vows never to try to influence or meddle with him, dragged him off to a quiet summer-house, and made him sit down and hearken to her.

"Malcolm," she began, "you spoke very harshly, very unkindly, very unjustly to me one evening since we came here; you joined one, who is no friend to either of us, in her exclamations against me; you implied that you desired I should marry a man in adversity, whom you insisted I ought not to speak civilly to in prosperity; you declared I had injured your prospects by not blasting my own happiness; though you knew our mother lacked no comfort money could procure for her, you affirmed, I might have made her life more peaceful by marrying, or, at least, temporizing, with a man I despised; you accused me of deceit, for not speaking on a painful subject; you said my secresy had ruined you, when I merely kept silent because I was perfectly well aware Alfred Westwood never would do anything for you, unless I married him, and very possibly not then. I believe he could, perhaps, have wrung a fortune out of Mrs. Merapie by some means, had I wedded him, but it would have been a fortune, not for you, but for me, his wife. I do

not profess to thoroughly understand Mr. Westwood, but he cannot blind me for all that, and though I am poor, I never intend to be his wife; do you hear that, Malcolm?"

"Yes, I do, and I 'm not sure that I ever wanted you, only Cecilia said——"

"I know she did," interposed Mina; "she has said a great many things you ought never to have believed, Malcolm; but I do not want to talk about her or the bitter words you spoke that night. I wish to tell you, first, what was the last sentence our mother ever spoke; I never have told you yet, because I never had an opportunity, and there has been a sort of coolness between us for a long time: I know why there has been and who has caused it, and therefore I have never felt angry with you, only hurt and grieved. Just before she died, she gasped out, 'Be a fond sister to Malcolm.' She was always far fonder of you than of me; you were her first thought, her pride, her darling; the place I held in her heart was nothing in comparison to that you occupied; I never heard her speak to me as she used to speak to you, as papa used to speak to me, till the very day she died; but still we were both her children: and do not you think, Malcolm, that if you had been there too, and life had lingered

for a minute longer, she might have added, "Be a fond brother to Mina?"

The young man did not answer for a minute; he looked away towards the mountains, though he was unconscious of seeing them. Then taking his sister's hand, he replied, with a sort of huskiness in his voice which betrayed more than he would have thought it dignified to confess,

"And so I will, little one, so I will, though she did not say it; I will be a fond brother, for her sake, and yours, and my own."

"There are only the two of us in the world, Malcolm," she continued, "only the two, strongly tied to one another. We have relatives and friends and acquaintances; but none so near, but that a day might alienate them; none so dear, but that they might feel themselves at perfect liberty to hate us bitterly: the bond between us is so strong, nothing ought ever to have power to snap it; there ought to be no coldness, no disguise in our conduct,—we must try to work with and for each other, to have no concealments, to be true to ourselves, and to join together against all external enemies; not to be influenced by the breath of slander or the words of strangers, who care for neither of us and only desire to sow sorrow in the hearts of both. Do you agree with me?"

"Yes." He said it half stupidly, as if he did not understand what she was driving at. Though he comprehended the little hint directed against Cecilia, he felt Mina's speech implied a vast deal more, and he waited for further explanation: it was speedily given.

"If we are truly brother and sister," recommenced Mina, "the secret of one ought to be the secret of both. I was once so wounded with you that I almost vowed I never would meddle in any affair of yours, never try to influence you, never tell you any plan of my own; but then I reflected that was not a right way for us to get on,—that where there is little confidence there can never be much fondness; and when I saw that Cecilia was beginning to sneer at you, as she sneered at me, to make you feel our painful position, to let you taste a drop of the cup she has long been making me swallow, my resolution was fairly overturned, and I thought I would neither bear longer myself, nor let you be humiliated by her and Alfred Westwood; and, in place of deciding to leave this alone, I determined to strive and get you to go with me."

"That 's all very well, Mina, and I have thought about it myself; but I really don't see where you can go, unless——"

"I marry Mr. Westwood; well, just listen to me, once for all, Malcolm, and remember I am not speaking now rashly and unthinkingly, but in calm sober earnest: before I would do that—before I would become wife to a man I hate and despise and scorn, and still dread, I would walk quietly down to that lake, and shroud myself from care and want and sorrow for ever in its deep waters. I know I should be committing a sin; but I should not care for that, because the other would be, to my mind, one nearly equally great. I should—if I saw no means of escape open but by death—choose death, and never think twice about the matter: you know I would do what I say, so you may settle your mind positively on one point, namely, that ever leave Craigmaver his wife—*I will not.*"

She had risen as she spoke. From the spot they occupied the lake below was clearly visible, lying calm, dark, and silent a hundred feet beneath; and, when she pointed with one hand down towards the grave she said she should never hesitate to select, and raised the other with a half-passionate, half-despairing gesture above her head, Malcolm—looking into her flushed face, gazing at the black sullen shadow lying across her eyes, hearkening to her thoroughly serious words—felt it was in her to do

audacious proposal with a perfectly unmoved face; and he echoed the words.

"To London, and that speedily?"

"Tell me," she said, in a sort of imperious tone —for she had made up her mind to go, whether he did or not, and, strong of purpose, she was resolute of speech—"tell me, when we came here, did you intend to stay all your life at Craigmaver?"

"No, merely to recruit our mother's health; but, then, you see, Mina, a great change has taken place lately."

"I know that; a mother has died—a sorrow has been endured: but, Malcolm, there is less now than ever to keep us here. For her sake we might have dreaded encountering the world with small means; but she can never feel earthly privation more: we have not a tie here of any kind; we ought to be gone; you must go to London and commence work of some kind."

Once again Malcolm tried to find refuge behind the old excuse.

"I really do not see, Mina," he said, "what is to become of you?"

"Will you oblige me, Malcolm, by thinking, not what is to become of me, but of yourself. I am going, whether you remain here or not. Miss Cal-

dera's cousin is dead; she has written to offer me a share of her home: I mean to return, and try whether I cannot make money either by translations or by original tales. I never told you before I had attempted writing, but I have; and now all that remains to be decided is, whether you will come and try to support yourself, as I mean to go and support myself. Will you choose?"

"But I say, Mina, have you any chance as a —whatever you call it—author, eh?" he eagerly demanded.

"That remains to be tried," she answered, with a smile; "I am a tolerable linguist at all events, and if I cannot do one thing, I will another—there, that's the secret I want you to keep: now will you go or stay?—stay here to be sneered at, and remain doing nothing, attempting nothing, hoping for nothing, or go to make a fortune, and obtain enough to buy a fine estate and become a man of consideration and substance: you can be that if you like; choose, brother."

Make a fortune! what a captivating phrase it is; how easily the words are spoken; what a "making" it generally proves; how seldom, when obtained, it seems worth the wear and tear and fret and trouble it required to gain it. But the idea is a fascinating

one, especially when with the sound no thought is conveyed to the sense of weary days and sleepless nights and toiling years, and obstacles to be surmounted and sorrows endured; when it is grasped by the fancy as readily as if produced at the touch of an enchanter; when all the brightness is revealed —all the darkness concealed. It costs but a breath to utter the phrase, it costs but a thought to realise it; the breath expires and the thought dies in time, but out of their ruins the fortune does not arise; the fabric, built of air—made tangible to imagination—crumbles into its original nothingness, and disappointment broods on the foundations, and anger and irritability dwell among the wrecks. Fortunes have to be made of sterner stuff than imagination: it is easy to talk of them—hard to win them; yet still the phrase is a captivating one uttered by hopeful lips, listened to by self-sufficient ears.

And Mina was hopeful, and her brother prone to believe fortune would come to him somehow; that he, by raising his finger, could command anything; so he was ruled by her, and Mina had incurred the heavy responsibility of leading him off after a chimera. She felt glad about it then, but her soul shrunk in after times from the weight of that responsibility—she could have led him by a thread

after a few minutes more of earnest vehement discourse: how she often wished afterwards he had been difficult to move as a log of wood, which might have resisted all her efforts to drag it from that place; not but what it was well for Malcolm to follow, though it was ill for her to lead; not but that the responsibility was a holy one, only it was rather too great for her.

It fettered and oppressed her in after times; but what else could she do then but go herself, and try to take him with her? what could she do? It was a choice presented between the known and the unknown—the felt and the unfelt; it was right for them to leave Craigmaver, but not as they did leave it—perfect children in sense and experience and folly, running off, without a thought of failure, in quest of the crock of gold, to be found at the end of the rainbow arch,—in search of what they never found for years; never found at all, unassisted, for themselves.

It was quite a stormy scene when Mina, who undertook to "break the news," declared they were going, that nothing but force should prevent her doing so. It was, indeed, rather an alarming declaration to "weak nerves," as Cecilia insinuated hers were; it was painful intelligence to be conveyed to

a loving heart such as the laird's actually was: all his old anxiety about the girl's welfare returned with tenfold intensity; his interest in—his love for —her came back to their old quarters; he implored, he pleaded, he commanded. Mr. Westwood, getting an inkling of the true state of the case, insisted he was the person to depart, a proposition the laird, instigated by Cecilia, refused to listen to, more particularly as Mina declared, if there were no such person in the world, she would go all the same, though she declined giving her reasons for taking such a step.

The torrent of opposition had well nigh swept Malcolm along with it; but Mina, sitting still amidst the uproar, said so fixedly,

"Malcolm may stay or go, just as he pleases, but I am determined; his resolution cannot influence mine," that the laird at length remarked, if she went, he should insist on Malcolm going also to take care of her, which observation settled Mr. Malcolm and made him decide to become her "grand protector."

"Mina, child," said Mr. Frazer, holding the girl to his heart and literally shedding tears over the wilful one, "Mina, child, do not go; for pity's sake stay here among those who love and wish you well!

Oh! my dear little niece, how time and the world have changed you since those days at Glenfiord, when a word from your old uncle would have made you do anything; but you do not care for me now, Mina."

As in those "old days," he had pushed back the long glossy curls from her face, so she now laid a gentle hand on his forehead and removed some straggling locks of silver white that strayed over it. She listened to him for a minute in perfect calmness; but all at once the sorrow of her soul burst forth.

"Don't call me changed," she cried; "anything but that: better than ever I did, I love you now: it's not for the world I pine, but for peace; I am forced to leave you, but it is not that *I* am changed: oh! no indeed, indeed I am not!"

She hardly knew what she was saying, but she put her arms round his neck and kissed him half wildly, and cried and sobbed as if her heart would break. Standing in the cold damp air of a winter morning, on the threshold of "beautiful Craigmaver," the stern old mountains contemplating that burst of passionate human feeling from afar, the pine trees looking on grim and motionless, the lake sleeping far below, she hung about him murmuring

she was not changed, and begging and praying him to believe her.

"Dear papa," exclaimed Cecilia, "how can you dream of standing there without your hat? Mina, I wonder you had not more consideration than to allow him; but then you never think about any person excepting——"

"Myself, Cecilia, you were going to say," returned Mina, raising her tearful face and gazing almost fiercely at the evil genius of that Highland home. "God witness between us which loves that good man best,—you or I,—which would sacrifice the most for him; but, dear uncle," she added, the flush of anger half fading from her cheek as she turned towards him, "do go in; it is far too cold for you here, only first bid me good-bye again, and say you don't think me changed,—say you don't."

Her face was touching his once more as she spoke, and she whispered the few last words so tenderly and entreatingly, that the old man had no choice left but to answer,

"I hope you are not; I will try to hope. He strained her to his heart: and, as Mina felt a tear fall on her face, she cried almost wildly,

"Oh! let me go; I shall die! let me go! Good-bye, good-bye, dear, dear uncle."

She was almost choking with emotion; she saw nothing, heeded no one but him; and, tearing herself away, she sprang into the carriage without even looking at Cecilia, and, burying her face in her hands, shut out Craigmaver and every external object from her sight. She never raised her head again for miles; and when she did, all visible traces of the mental storm, save death-like paleness, had passed away.

"Mina," said her brother, "should you like to go back again?"

"No," she obstinately answered, and for hours she spoke not a single word.

"Do come in, papa," Cecilia said as the vehicle drove off; "you will be sure to catch cold, and, as she was so willing to go, you need not grieve so much about her: she will be very happy in London, I dare say, much happier in the midst of its gaiety than shut up in our quiet hermitage here: she went off without bidding me good-bye; what a strange wayward creature she is. But do come in, dear papa," and the lady laid a persuasive hand on his sleeve when she concluded.

The old man withdrew his eyes from the southern road and turned to re-enter the house, sighing deeply. For about the first time in his life, he felt

Cecilia's words jar on his feelings: he did not know why, but his heart seemed like a loosened string, which, having been thoughtlessly touched by a rude finger, the sound it returned to his soul was harsh and discordant.

For, oh! how he once loved the child of his dead nephew, she who was now gone forth so lonely and friendless,—he knew; how he loved her still, spite of all her faults, he felt, but cared not to confess. It was about the first note Cecilia had ever unintentionally struck out of tune; perhaps, indeed, it was not so much out of tune as time: it had not been judiciously pressed down just at the right moment, and it consequently grated, with the force of a discord, on the ear of the listener. And so the old laird, without answering a word, walked mournfully into the house.

His granddaughter felt piqued to see the effect Mina's departure had produced, and angrily accompanied him; she shut the hall door with a sort of bang, which sound once again smote on Mr. Frazer's heart; for, when the nerves are loosened, even a breath causes them to vibrate and tremble. He crossed the hall with a heavy step, and moodily entered his library without asking Cecilia to follow him.

She who noticed everything, noticed this, and she consequently turned towards the drawing-room with a disdainful shrug; but her displeasure did not prevent her hearing that the old man was coughing, as had very frequently been the case for some time past, painfully.

About three weeks afterwards, a letter directed to Allan Frazer, Esq., senior, and marked "Private," with two emphatic strokes underneath the word, arrived by the southern post at Craigmaver. Allan Frazer, junior, who had ten days previously been hastily summoned from Edinburgh, in consequence of his father's illness, after gazing intently at it for a minute, laid the missive unopened in his desk, and turned the key upon his cousin's dispatch.

"I will keep it for him," the young man murmured, "till he is better."

Days passed away, but the looked-for improvement never came. Feverishly Mina had written that letter; eagerly she awaited a reply: she wondered, day by day, whether it had offended him—if he were from home—if Cecilia had intercepted it—or whether he had shown it to her and she was adroitly satirizing it; she felt as if it must have produced an effect of some kind, good, bad, or indifferent; she thought for weeks of nothing but that letter, never

dreaming how it was lying unthought of, unopened, totally forgotten,—whilst sorrow shadowed the house, a corpse tenanted one of the formerly pleasant chambers, a funeral train wound solemnly down the avenue.

The old laird was dead. His eyes had closed on earth's sorrows for ever without reading the record of trial, the assurances of love, the story of foolish hopes, the half explanation that missive contained; his hand never touched the sheet; he had no opportunity of learning to understand her better, no leisure to grow to love her more: yet, almost the last words he uttered ere passing to that land where deceit and hypocrisy find no entrance, ere casting earthly blindness from him and walking into the full glory of celestial light, were,

"And Mina, Allan, our Mina, be kind to her; if she need help, as she will some day, be to her like a brother. I hope, I believe she is *not* changed."

If he had seen down into her soul, if he had read even the partial disclosures of what was passing there contained in her epistle, blotted occasionally by a tear, and the text made clearer—paradoxical as it may sound—by that unintentional marginal note, he would have been quite sure that, if she were changed, it was only for the better.

Allan Frazer knew perfectly well that he ought to return the letter to Mina rather than open it himself, but he adopted the latter course one day after the interment was over; and then, with a sort of pang, he sat down to answer it and tell her the news of his grandfather's death.

He told her of the charge he had received from the deceased, to "be kind to our Mina." He said he would always be a friend, a cousin, a brother to her and Malcolm; he touched slightly on the sudden departure from Craigmaver, and implied he understood the cause more clearly than she had cared to explain it; he alluded to what she had told her uncle of her intention to support herself by "pen work," and added, that he would help her with money, influence, suggestions, time,—anything she required, he would do; in any way she could think of, he would help her, his poor dear little Mina, who had been so lately a child and who was still his sister.

The girl scanned the contents of that long, most truly affectionate letter through blinding tears; he never once asked her to come back to Craigmaver; but the burden of the whole was, "let me help you."

It might not be; Mina scarcely knew why, but

she felt the fact: it was not but that they were, in some sort, like brother and sister; since childhood, the laird had seemed to her to come only after her father, Allan scarcely after Malcolm, in her heart's affections: it was not that she felt estranged from him, that she was proud, or angry, or morbid; no, but she could take nothing from him: she might have subdued her spirit, tamed her nature sufficiently to have gone and begged a boon from Alfred Westwood, but she never would, so long as she lived, accept the commonest favour from the hands of Cecilia's husband. She cared not to ask herself why, because so many painful reproaches, so many sharp stinging words, returned to memory as she analyzed, or rather attempted to analyze, her feelings; but she was resolved, and so she quietly wrote and told him.

It was a brief letter, almost touching in its simple expressions of gratitude, almost mournful in its earnest, absurd, self-reliance; there was not a word in it intended to convey an intimation of her real reasons for refusing assistance from him; but all was clear to Allan as the noonday sun,—he read her heart through her actions; he saw her wish that intercourse of all sort should cease; he knew she meant that for a final adieu to Scotland—her early

home, his present abode,—himself, Cecilia, everything; and, watching the expression of his wife's face, when she accidentally caught sight of the envelope, he acknowledged, in bitterness of heart, that the girl was right,—that friend, cousin, sister, she could never be to him more; that, inferior in beauty and talents and accomplishments though she might be to the graceful mistress of Craigmaver, she was still sufficient to be jealous of, to have some feminine venom poured out upon. Yes, it was better there should be no correspondence between him and his cousins, even on business.

Still he felt he must do something for them, so he sent a large sum of money to Mina, to fulfil the desire of his grandfather that he should help her; but Mina returned the money, and the note, thanking him for his offer, was the last that for years passed between them,—the last, save one, and that one came not then.

So the Highlands faded from Mina's eyes: thus the friends and the relatives of early days dropped off one by one; thus the vision of her childhood—"perfect happiness"—melted away as she and Malcolm started in life, all alone.

CHAPTER XV.

STONY-HEARTED LONDON.

STILL time went on,—oh! with such a steady unwavering march over the city streets, and the tramp of his measured footsteps wore a sort of channel in Mina's heart, to be filled up with all kinds of griefs, anxiety, self-reproach; for Malcolm could get no "government situation," Mina no employment; their money dwindled down to "*nil*," or, at all events, the bottom of their hoard was rendered clearly perceptible by the limited number of sovereigns scattered over it. She grew restless, pale, ill, careworn; he impatient, repining, hard to be satisfied, occasionally snappish, always discontented. "Life in London" now, was a very different affair from what it had once been.

Malcolm detested moping in the house, still, he professed himself unable to face the sight of his fellows in a shabby hat and threadbare coat; he

would have been glad enough to purchase a commission or anything then, and had come to believe it might be possible for him to exist on his pay, but the money which could once have procured it was gone, and there were no means by which he could get more; for once again — although he did not know that—Mina had cast fortune from him, by declining assistance from Allan Frazer: and, though he candidly confessed he would have accepted help from the "arch fiend," had that personage only been so obliging as to offer it, he could not go begging to any one; and, as Allan never wrote to him, he never wrote to Allan.

And was there nobody else? Well, yes; he might have asked Mr. Ivraine, but he did not like; his pride, his feelings of delicacy, alike forbade that; for, he argued, it would show "there was a split between us and the Craigmaver people; and, besides, it would look as if, because I once picked him up in the street, I fancied I had a sort of claim. No, hang it! that would be mean; I can't do that."

Which was the more praiseworthy in him, as the first time Mr. Ivraine called, after their return from Scotland, he asked very pointedly if there were any way he could forward Malcolm's views. To be sure he did not know the youth had then no definite

ones, but he evidently thought he ought to have; and, on Malcolm answering in the negative, he turned away, as Mina's brother thought, disappointed: so that, on the whole, that part of his conduct was meritorious; it was about the only part at that period, however.

How Mina toiled, Miss Caldera could almost have wept to see, for she knew nothing but disappointment could ever be in store for her, and yet still no word she said was able to turn the girl from her purpose; the more she talked, the more obstinate Mina became; she wanted to support herself, she said, and truly there was need she should be able to work out her object, as she seemed very little inclined to let any other person provide that support for her—not even Ernest Ivraine, as Miss Caldera had once quietly suggested.

But she was met on that solitary occasion with such a burst of proud, angry, resentful expressions —such a torrent of denunciatory remarks concerning matrimony, and match-making, and wedding for money, and marrying for homes, as fairly astounded her.

The "anti-Westwood fever was nothing to that," the governess asserted, and so for months Mr. Ivraine's name was never mentioned between them;

but as the financial difficulty increased, her friend seriously began to wish Mina would come to her senses some way or other, and marry any sensible person who would take care of her, and put Malcolm in the way of earning an "honest livelihood" —a favourite phrase of the lady, which she used on all occasions, to the ineffable disgust both of the young gentleman to whom it referred, and of that young gentleman's sister. They "could not come down to their circumstances," so Miss Caldera told them frequently, and it was true; Mina had not yet learned patience, nor Malcolm sense.

Miss Caldera felt a weighty charge had devolved on her; she was not actually supporting them yet, but it would soon come to that, she clearly foresaw: and, if she had imagined her small means could prove sufficient, she would never have repined, only she thought Malcolm ought to exert himself, and she knew Mina was breaking her heart in hunting a will-o'-the-wisp, a shadow without a substance, a hope without a foundation.

One day the girl came in, looking angry, vexed, and flushed. Wearily, and yet still pettishly, she flung down a parcel on the table, and dropping into the nearest chair, remained silently gazing at the windows of number 24, just opposite, where a young

stock-broker lodged—it was not of him she was thinking though—till Miss Caldera broke the stillness by the brief query,

"Well, Mina?"

"Well," repeated that young lady, speaking rapidly—as was her wont when much annoyed—"why only what I might have expected. When I tried original English tales, they wanted French translations; when I took them French translations, they thought, perhaps, Italian would suit the public taste better; when I had finished the Italian, they said the rage for that kind of literature was past, and suggested German; and now, when I have nearly lost my eyesight poring over those unchristian hieroglyphics, and half-choked myself learning their horrid gutturals, I find they are overstocked with German translations, and think I had better try the French again."

"And you——"

"Said I should try no more."

"And so——" once again suggested Miss Caldera.

"And so, here is my manuscript, and there is an end of it," finished Mina.

"I told you when you first began this wild goose chase, that no woman could effect anything, and

that you had better marry Mr. Westwood, Mina," remarked her friend.

"And I told you one woman would effect much, and that I would not marry Mr. Westwood," said the girl; "and I mean to prove my words true yet, in spite of fate."

"Indeed! I thought you said but just now you would try no more——"

"Translations," explained Mina; "there are too many clever women, ay, and for that matter, too many clever men, at the business for me to have any chance; no, no, I mean to return to my own work, and stick to it."

"Certain that in original literature you will meet with no rivals," her friend said, with a smile.

Mina bit her lip, but made no reply; whilst Miss Caldera proceeded.

"You think me most unsympathising and ill-natured and narrow-minded, I know; but, believe me, I only speak thus to save you from certain misery, positive anxiety, that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick, and, most certainly, ultimate failure and disappointment."

"Pleasant prospect," remarked Mina.

"Anything but it," returned the lady; "you are wasting your youth and your strength and your

energies in endeavours which cannot prove otherwise than useless. Where one manuscript is accepted, fifty are rejected—for one author who succeeds, twenty fail; it is the most unsatisfactory, unremunerative, thankless profession in which man ever engaged; and, as for woman! even if she rise to anything beyond a mere scribbler of love tales for some tenth-rate magazine, literary reputation never brings any real satisfaction with it to her. You have not—I must say plainly what I think, what I know, Mina—either the talent or the patience necessary to ensure anything at all like a third or fourth class standing, or, in fact, any standing at all; and, further, I believe you have not sufficient humility to be satisfied except with a place on the daïs."

"It is agreeable to be complimented," said Mina, with a very feeble attempt at unconcern.

"It is not agreeable to hear the truth, I admit, but hereafter you will thank me for speaking it; you have, in spite of all your foibles, enough good sense left to bear with me, though I will not compliment: the real fault in your training is to be found in the fact that you have been too much flattered——"

"By you," suggested Mina tartly.

"No, but by every one else; if I have understood

you rightly,—by your father and cousin; to my own knowledge, by mother, brother, Mr. Merapie, Mr. Westwood: it is better for me to tell you these things than a stranger. Your friends imagined you were cleverer than most girls who had the same opportunities, and they were wrong; I admit you have abilities, but I deny you are a genius, and I implore you not to delude yourself into that belief; you can do literally nothing, as I told you long ago; in fact, to repeat what I have said fifty times before, there is, in a general way, nothing a woman can do except——"

"Marry," supplied Mina.

"Except marry," acquiesced Miss Caldera.

"Refuge for the destitute," remarked Mina.

"And not altogether a bad one," retorted her friend.

"But one of which I do not intend to avail myself just at present," said Mina. "I wonder, when you have such an opinion of it, you do not set me the example."

She was sorry the next moment she had uttered the thoughtless speech, for the blood came mantling up into Miss Caldera's face as she replied,

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness, Mina dear; but," she proceeded, after a pause, "I know

the annoyance these perpetual rejections are giving you, and I really see no use in your persisting in making griefs for yourself and needlessly inflicting pain on others; I never see you take a grammar in your hand, or sit down to write, or put on your bonnet to go out, but a sort of dread comes over me: I do wish, from the very bottom of my heart, dear child, you would give up this wild idea; believe me, you will never make it a reality."

"I would give it up to-morrow," returned Mina, if you could suggest anything in its place."

The governess remained silent, and Mina continued.

"You see, dear old friend, affairs are getting desperate with us; by some means I *must* make money: point out to me any other way by which I can earn the amount necessary, and, if that way should turn out to be sweeping a crossing, I will thankfully go and do it."

Time was when Miss Caldera would have laughed at this declaration, but she did not do so now; she received it as a matter of sober earnest, a thing the girl would actually perform, "for affairs were," as she said, "getting desperate," and Mina, though not humbled, was being so; wherefore her friend replied,

"I tell you, Mina, there is no way for you; suppose you had the 'gift,' which I say you have not; suppose you had genius, imagination, tact, and the thousand and one *et ceteras* needful to make a successful author; suppose, again, you had a friend to assist, you might think yourself especially fortunate if, for several years, you could make sufficient to cover the expenses of pens, ink, and foolscap. You see what teaching is; you are unfit for any profession, trade, employment; but such is not the case with Malcolm,—no man who will work need starve: but you encourage him in all his absurd ideas, and talk about this thing and that situation not being genteel, as if he were now in a position to consider gentility, that monstrous bugbear which has only power to influence weak-minded women and foolish men."

"What would you have him do?" impatiently demanded Mina.

"Work," was the rejoinder; "abandon this chimerical government situation notion, and put his shoulder to the wheel wherever he sees a vacancy, low down or high up: I have no patience with him, I confess, or sympathy in his aristocratic laziness, nor can I endure to hear you aiding and abetting every distaste and whim and vagary he has: if he

cannot be a clerk, let him turn labourer, cabman, porter, anything rather than what he is at present, —a listless, dissatisfied, useless being, who smokes half his time, and sleeps—when he is not grumbling —the remainder."

"I could not ask him to *work*," said Mina, laying a painful emphasis on the word, and flushing as she spoke it; "I could not ask him to do that: I brought him here:—because of me—yes, I may as well speak plainly when I am at it — because of me he can hope for no assistance from Craigmaver. He came to London on my suggestion: I meant to make money for us both; if he were not able to get a government appointment, I intended to buy him a commission, and—and I cannot say now—'disgrace our family and connexions and yourself by accepting some menial situation'—I cannot do it."

"Disgrace, nonsense," retorted Miss Caldera, for the conclusion of the above speech trenched on hostile ground, and she rose in arms on the moment; "I declare, Mina Frazer, you would provoke a saint with your anti-business prejudices and your Highland pride and your stuff about family connections who would not care if you died in a workhouse to-morrow. You seem to imagine the sun was made to shine for you; my mother once

entertained a similar idea with regard to me, but——"

"But what?" demanded her auditor.

"She found she was mistaken, or, at least, I did for her," was the response.

"By which remark you mean to imply," said Mina, "that Malcolm and I will make a similar discovery; do you not think trial enough has fallen to our lot to convince us the sun can go down as well as rise and shine?"

"No," replied Miss Caldera; "you are not half tamed, nor is Malcolm; but you will both, or I am greatly mistaken, get a 'settler,' yet: however, as you are so very fastidious, as you seem so very anxious to make your brother's path smooth, why do you not marry and ask your husband to help him?"

"Husbands are not to be picked up on every door step, Miss Caldera," retorted Mina; "they are a rare commodity."

"All the more valuable for that," remarked her friend, "as I told you before about Mr. Westwood."

"Yes, but Mr. Westwood is to me dead and buried; I would not take him when I could get him, and now, when I know the worth of the prize

I rejected, I cannot go and ask him to marry me, can I, dear friend?"

"You will get a settler, yet," repeated the governess; "but," she added, not perceiving that the girl's levity of manner was merely assumed, to cover a smarting wound, "but I was not then thinking of Mr. Westwood; I was alluding to Mr. Ivraine."

"Well," said Mina, remembering Mr. Westwood's taunt, and choking back all signs of emotion with a desperate effort, "shall I ask *him?*"

"Mina Frazer," returned Miss Caldera, "I could shake you."

"Miss Caldera," replied Mina, "will you be so kind as to abandon the theme matrimonial? I do not like it. With what kind of feeling do you suppose I could meet Mr. Ivraine, after you have suggested to me the propriety of trying to 'catch him.' I loathe and detest the very mention of match-making or marrying from prudential motives."

"You will repent your conduct some day, Mina," her friend began; but Mina, whose pride and vanity and sensitiveness were all alike touched by the *finale* she knew was approaching, here vehemently interposed in a tone of much pique, the reason of her great annoyance finding vent at last.

"If I were rich you would not say such things to me; it is because you know I have no money or the capability of making any, that you speak thus. If I were rich——"

"It would not make the slightest difference in my opinion," interposed her friend; "if you would only listen to reason for one moment, and consider the value and the rarity of a true disinterested attachment——"

"A true disinterested folly," broke out Mina, the blood rushing up into her cheeks and the tears into her eyes at a precisely similar ratio of speed; but, almost immediately recovering her self-possession, she added in a less abrupt manner, "I believe it is all nonsense, indeed I do; but supposing every word you utter to be the perfection of wisdom, supposing me to be tractable and willing to follow your advice and — and — settle down into a country squire's country wife, don't you think—now don't you, wisest of friends, think that it might, on the whole, be advisable for me to wait till the aforesaid country squire asketh me, Mina Frazer, to become the aforesaid country wife?"

Miss Caldera could endure with patience any vehement outburst of temper; she very rarely lost her own: she was as fond of a game at argument as

some good folks are of a game at chess; and so, whenever her adversary threw a king, or, in other words, an opinion, into a precarious position by over haste or an absence of sufficient reflection, she bore down upon her antagonist in first-fate style, drawing, in the forms of cogent and rapid reasons, bishops, knights, and castles around the stronghold of her unhappy opponent, check-mated and put him *hors de combat* in a moment.

And thus it chanced that, whenever Mina grew extremely angry on any point, Miss Caldera became proportionably cool and drily provoking; but occasionally—once, perhaps, in a year or so—Mina had a way of turning the tables quietly round and settling herself in a sort of defiant position, from whence she calmly flung missiles at the head of her tormentor. Then Miss Caldera fairly lost all patience; she felt her place had been usurped, that Mina was getting the best of it, that nothing but anger was capable of dislodging her from the post she occupied; and accordingly, on the present occasion, she commenced a vehement denunciation, which was only cut short by Malcolm opening the door and demanding, in the sort of slang Mina always regretted to hear him use, "what was the row."

"Only the finish of a little altercation Mina and

I have had, which originally commenced about her literary efforts."

"I wish to heavens," said Malcolm pettishly, coining a word for his own especial convenience, "I wish to heavens she had never 'efforted' anything about them; and that when women are living together they could agree. If she had not deceived me about what she could do, and had kept from quarrelling with Cecilia, we might have been at Craigmaver; still or, at least, she might, for Allan, I 'm sure, would have done something for me instead of leaving me here stranded like a shipwrecked waif: men get on together well enough; why the deuce ladies wrangle so tremendously I cannot understand."

Mina bent her head over her breast, but said never a word, while Miss Caldera answered,

"It is because men are never thrown with men as we are with each other; believe me, you would not stand the ordeal one single bit better if you were subjected to a similar test: but, although your cousin and you are not on very intimate terms at present, is there nothing you can think of which might prove the means of procuring a livelihood for yourself?"

"If it were not for Mina," he said impatiently,

"I 'd ship myself off to the colonies to-morrow, or enter as able-bodied seaman on board some man-of-war, or enlist: hang it! I 'm so sick of the whole business of life, perhaps I might drown myself; at all events, I would do something, but I cannot leave her."

It was the old excuse again; but it passed current this time, for Miss Caldera was so eager to get her own ideas into circulation, that she had scarcely leisure to notice the counterfeit coin he handed to her in exchange.

"I want Mina to marry," she began.

"I wish to goodness she was settled some way or other," he exclaimed; "I 'm sure, as you say, it is the only thing a woman can do, and I know she ought to have married long ago."

"You told me yourself, Malcolm, you never would give your consent to anything of the kind," said Mina, raising her face, and speaking hurriedly with parched lips, "you know you did, when you came back from India—when——"

"Things were different then," he interrupted, "and I did not know so much about the world, and about you, and I thought Westwood beneath us—and so he is; but still he would have been a vast deal better than beggary, as you may find yet, Mina."

"Well, but she detested Mr. Westwood," remarked Miss Caldera; "and, besides, we cannot go and ask him if he be still desirous to marry her: but there are others in the world who are fond of your sister,—Mr. Ernest Ivraine, for instance."

"Ay, Mina, what do you think of him?" demanded Malcolm, for it was a subject he and Miss Caldera had once before discussed, and he was not sorry to have an opportunity of reverting to it; "what do you think of him?"

"I think little of him," said Mina, rising from her seat and talking very slowly, with clenched hands, and a sort of nervous fierceness, "excepting that he is a strange, reserved, silent individual; but I think of you, Malcolm, that if you had a spark of manly feeling about you, a particle of brotherly consideration, a single idea such as your father's son ought to have, a regard for yourself and the name you bear, you would not be going over a catalogue of 'desirable' husbands in order to select one to fasten me upon: I will be no party to such a conversation; I would leave the house before I would endure further persecution of this kind; I——"

"Mr. Ivraine is in the drawing-room, sir," said a servant, opening the door at this moment; which

announcement curtailed Mina's speech of its fair proportions, and sent Malcolm upstairs to the old favourite jigging time denominated six-eight.

CHAPTER XVI.

MINA RUSHES ON HER FATE.

It might have been imagined that Ernest Ivraine would hardly have been the man voluntarily to make a fresh care and anxiety for himself, nor had he voluntarily, in the first instance, sown the seeds of a troublesome crop, promising, if fostered, to bring forth trials abundantly; no—that inexplicable something which moulds our life's experiences into a definite shape—fate, chance, accident, call it by what name you will—cast the germ into the ground, and he—half-unconsciously, perhaps—instead of nipping and crushing it in the bud, nursed and tended the plant, so that, at length, after it had grown, when he came to see the evil of it—when he discovered the sorrow it was likely to prove, he found its roots had twined themselves so around his heart that he could only eradicate the one by tearing out the other.

The soil of his rugged nature was one in which it was difficult to get any tender emotion to flourish; but that obstacle once surmounted, the rest was easy. It stayed there, spite of himself, spite of circumstances, spite of prudence, through life; and so, since her uncle's death, since he came to understand how poor Mina actually was, since he had found that, like himself, she was penniless, he had never listened to the voice of prudence at all. He felt, so long as Mina was likely to be an heiress, that to her he was—must always be—nothing; but now, though he might not marry, he could care for her, and he would have done anything in the world to make her care for him: but Mina would not; she had been annoyed, not by, but through him; her pride was wounded, her vanity offended; her womanly feelings were insulted; they never seemed destined to "get on" together. Mina went back with him to what she had been with others as a child: but that made no difference to him; he was fond of her, though he never exactly knew why he was so; though he could not have given a single reason for his apparently extraordinary choice, there could not be a single doubt of the matter: he, Ernest Ivraine, a prudent, practical, silent, uncommunicative man, was, nevertheless, so totally de-

ficient in worldly sense and worldly caution as to form a very sincere affection for a girl without a shilling, of whose real nature he had not the faintest idea, many years younger than himself, not handsome—merely pretty, with a strange wayward mood, and a not especially placid temper. In one word, he had made one cold plunge into the stream of his fate, and found himself—sometimes to his pleasure, oftener to his sorrow—decidedly in love.

Sir Ernest, shrewdly suspecting this, wrote a confidential missive to Messrs. Smeek and Scott, inquiring about John Merapie and his family; but the solicitors, not being detective officers, merely informed him, by return of post, that they understood Mr. Merapie was dead, and his widowed sister removed from London: wherefore the baronet was once more thrown off the scent, and he did not find it again till too late to benefit by it.

Colin Saunders, who had now been for a considerable period "useful man" about Paradise, indeed heard occasionally from his daughter—who lived near Miss Caldera, and had established a sort of patronizing intimacy with that lady's servant—how Mr. Ivraine was great friends with Mr. Malcolm Frazer, and spent half his time with him when in London; but Colin never guessed the truth—

never thought so "dark-browed a young gentleman" would dream of marrying any one but some great heiress; and, even if he had known all, and the baronet had stretched him on the rack, he would have divulged nothing. He was a worthy descendant of the stiff old Covenanters, who worshipped on the bare hill sides, and skulked in caves, and braved death and persecution and torture for conscience sake. "The man was a mass of sterling steady principle," so Ernest once said, and he was right.

"When the heart gives the will, the devil gives the way," is one of those aphorisms people never care to speak, because it can lay no claim to beauty of thought and elegance of expression; but still, one which nobody can deny, because it generally proves so strictly true. Far be it from me to say that his Satanic majesty had any share in sending Ernest Ivraine so often to London, but surely it was an evil genius which drove him so perpetually across Mina's path: excuses were never wanting to render a visit to the metropolis needful, for Henry was married now—married to an heiress, rich in goodness, beauty, friends, and ancestors. The young officer inundated his brother with lists of commissions he desired executed,—every third or fourth

Indian mail brought with it the necessity for a journey to town; and the sum Ernest had accumulated on Henry's behalf, but which Henry had exultingly returned to him, enabled the miser's elder son to protract his visits a little longer than it would otherwise have been possible for him to do: so he was always coming to see Malcolm, perpetually being announced as "in the drawing-room, sir," by the maid-of-all-work, after the fashion recorded towards the conclusion of the preceding chapter, before this explanation of his feelings was commenced.

On the day in question, however, he did not see Mina; she had a bad headache, went to her own room, and, moreover, to put it out of Malcolm's power to torment her further, went determinedly off to bed.

Perhaps her brother really thought she was ill; perhaps he regretted annoying the pale-faced girl, his only near relative; perhaps he felt there was much blameable in his own conduct; perhaps some words Ernest Ivraine had spoken, during the course of their interview, might have induced him to look more affectionately at her—less angrily on the world; perhaps it was only the usual reaction, which generally occurred after he had been particularly pettish

towards her; perhaps her concluding sentence had touched his heart and aroused his pride; at all events one thing was certain, that he was so kind to her the following morning, so different from usual, so much like the wild good-natured youth of other times, that Mina forgot her vexation, and felt for the moment happy to see him so; and that afternoon, when the baronet's son walked in with her brother, she did not go to bed again, but remained in the room, not talking herself, but listening to them doing so,—for, at last, Malcolm had appealed to Mr. Ivraine for advice, and Mr. Ivraine, for the first time since Mina had known him, spoke long, earnestly, energetically; he grew absolutely eloquent whilst looking at the young man's position, and exhorting him to do what he had not been brave enough to do himself. The difference between them was, however, that he was waiting and longing for something, and Malcolm was not, —unless, indeed, for absolute beggary, which he had unintentionally confessed was stalking towards them. Ernest at length comprehended how they were situated, and he first advised strenuously, and then proffered assistance.

It was a painful conversation throughout; Mina felt it to be so, as, step by step, word by word, it

approached the end; but there was a fascination about it for her: even had a sufficient pretext arisen for her to leave the apartment, she could not have done it, so strongly were her interest excited, her feelings aroused: there was a fate in it, as there is in all things in earth below, in heaven above.

"I will tell you," said Mr. Ivraine, by way of conclusion to the many arguments he had advanced, in order to induce Malcolm to go forth and battle manfully,—for he felt a sort of sympathy for and interest in him, and desired to warn the youth, ere it was too late, to avoid the quicksand on which he was stranded,—"I will tell you," he repeated, rising and leaning against the corner of the mantel-piece, his face turned towards both his auditors, "what course a friend of mine adopted, whose case was not, apparently, nearly so hopeless as yours. Would to God I had followed his example a dozen years since, my lot would have been a happier one; but let that pass. He was not qualified for a business man; he had not received an education fitting him to be a professional one; his father would not push him forward in any way: he had friends, it is true, possessed of some influence; but they thought, and naturally, it was his parent's duty to provide for him; and, even had such not been the case, he was

too proud and self-reliant to seek their assistance. He disliked home for many sufficient reasons; but still, recollect he had a home—and—so long as he remained there, a species of support, which you have not. That fact makes all the difference between your cases. He was not absolutely compelled to work; you ought to have been doing so long ago.

"He thought for a time, and then he acted. Starting from his father's house one gloomy morning in November, with a money capital of a few shillings, and none other, save an energetic determined spirit, which will accomplish more for a man than any moderate amount of money, high birth, or connexion.

"People said he was mad, for his father was rich, an old man, likely to die soon; they affirmed, if he had only waited a little longer he would have found wealth ready made to his hand, whereas, by his rashness, he had flung the chance of fortune—save by his own exertions—from him for ever; but he replied, he had rather make a fortune than wait for one, that he desired the death of no man, and that he would not waste the best years of his life lounging about home, and putting himself in the way of being tempted to commit a great sin, viz. that of

wishing for his father's death: he said, that those who stayed might gain; that, for his part, he would either win a happy home for himself on the earth, or else seek it in the grave; that, if he earned a name, his father should hear of him again,—if not, he would never return to the land of his birth more."

The speaker paused for a moment, but neither Malcolm nor Mina interposed a word. Unconsciously, whilst recalling the events of that night, he had grown desperately in earnest, and that earnestness flung such a stamp of reality upon the narrative, that the listeners felt, in hearkening to it, almost as though the hopeful, ardent, brave adventurer were standing there before them, recounting with his own lips the story of his trials, resolves, struggles. Mina's gaze became rivetted on the miser's eldest born; she wanted to hear what one so situated had done: to learn, for a certainty, what her brother might do. Ernest Ivraine met that anxious, eager glance, and felt it pain, even while it calmed, him. With a half sigh, turning his eyes on Malcolm and striving to forget the straining look he knew was fastened on his face, he resumed:

"He went as I have said, enlisted in the army as a common soldier in a regiment just about embarking for India, never informed his father of the step

he had taken, never repented him of it,—but sailed, —a gentleman in the uniform of the ranks.

"Years rolled away, and in England there was only one who knew accurately what had become of him; and when that friend was at length enabled to send him out a sum sufficient to purchase a commission, it was returned with the proud boast that he had bought one with his blood; that he had fought his way up to the point where he stood, and could show for every step some severe wound, some long deep scar. Note the result of his rash folly, as people termed it. His father is still living: he might have grown grey-haired waiting for the wealth which could only be his through the death of a parent, and was then contingent on the old man's will; he might have moped and dawdled and murmured away the best years of his existence, of no use to mortal being, a burden to himself, and have, finally, died first or gained nothing after all. He made a better and a manlier choice, has won name, position, honour, some money, much love. If you, Malcolm Frazer, will go and do likewise, I think I can promise to give you the first step, which he had to hew out for himself: make up your mind to go out to India; I will obtain an ensigncy or something for you there: after that, all depends

on yourself: only resolve to be great, and you may become so,—only determine to rise, and that determination will give you wings to soar almost to any height you please.

"Will you at once take courage and example from a true story of life? cease waiting and watching and vaguely hoping, and finally act. I do not proffer assistance through officiousness, but solely because I imagine you require, and perhaps might not object to accept it. If you do not like the plan, say so frankly; if you decide to follow it, only speak the word and I will aid you by every means in my power. Will you go or stay?"

Who, with poverty on the one side and the realization of his boyish hopes on the other, would have hesitated to choose? Not Mina's brother, for, without an instant's reflection, he cried,

"Go, with a hundred thousand thanks."

"You have spoken wisely and well," remarked Ernest.

"Mina, what say you?" demanded her brother in a kind eager tone, and with sparkling eyes; "I have been little of a comfort, little save a trouble for a long time; still you will miss me: what say you?"

"That you must go," she answered, speaking

firmly, even though she could not prevent tears springing to her eyes at the prospect of this last break.

"You are right, Miss Frazer," said Mr. Ivraine; "your brother ought not to waste his life either here or in Scotland,—he must go to India: and you," he added, after a pause, "you will return to Craigmaver, I presume."

The blood came rushing up into Mina's face, and a sort of agonized remembrance of what that place had once been, of what it had lately become, sweeping unbidden through her soul, checked her utterance; but Malcolm, who liked not the appearance of aught being amiss betwixt himself and the wealthy head of their clan, answered promptly, "Of course."

Ernest Ivraine looked at her for a moment almost despairingly; he thought of her desolate position, of his wretched home, of a choice between none and that, of whether his father would receive her and what difference it might make in his future prospects, of being separated from her for ever, of having her beside him always, of which would be the worst for her,—to be a wife amongst his friends or a dependant amidst her own—with one in the world to love her tenderly, or all perhaps looking coldly upon

her. He could not leave her—he feared to take her. He saw there was a something which prevented *her* thinking of a return to Scotland as of a happy event. Was it that her proud spirit brooked not the idea of being a pauper in the house of her rich cousins? or was it—could it be—that she cared for him?

If so, she would not value the smiles or the frowns of relatives; she would endure privation, grief, annoyance, for a brief space, for his sake. All swept through his mind with the velocity of light: the old barriers of prudence, consideration for her happiness, dread of the result, were broken down instantaneously as he gazed upon her troubled face, and then came rapidly forth the words,

"I know little, it is true, of your affairs; but believe there is no other home open for her, unless —she will marry me."

He spoke to Malcolm, but he looked towards Mina; he could read nothing from her face; he saw she tried to speak, but could not; he felt he cared for her more than ever, whilst his destiny thus hung quivering in the hands of fate.

The second which ensued after his abrupt question without his receiving an answer, seemed such an eternity of torture that, to shorten its duration,

he said to Malcolm, in a tone tremulous with suppressed emotion,

"Do you think she would?"

"I answer yes for her," returned Malcolm boldly, though he felt half conscious he was tampering with her fate, solely that he might win his own game; "if you wish to hear it from her lips, she will say so too: Mina, speak."

One quick despairing glance into the past, an equally rapid and hopeless one towards the two futures now presented for her choice, a thought of the selfishness of clouding Malcolm's prospects again—of flinging him once more friendless and helpless on the barren shore where he had till that morning been lying,—a dream of all he might rise to, if she would just do that which she had for so long been told she ought, a reckless sensation concerning her own destiny, a feeling of gratitude towards the man who offered so much to both—who must have a regard for her,—and then Mina, at the command of her brother, pronounced the monosyllable she had long vowed she would not speak, but which now, as it was pronounced, she would have died ere recanting, unless he—Ernest Ivraine—wished it. And oh! how many a time did she pray that he might desire it.

But he did not: once or twice he thought of telling her frankly and fairly what a life lay before her; but then the dread that she might repent, and the conviction that her position as his wife would be better than any other which presented itself added to the hope that hereafter he could give her all he might only wish for her now, kept him silent. He entered the house that day resolved not to drag her into misery, vowing never to utter a single syllable till he was independent—Sir Ernest Ivraine, his own master—a fortune-hunter no longer; and he left it with the little word of assent ringing in his ears, alternately with the sound of a blessing and the power of a curse.

"Mina is finally settled, Miss Caldera," said Malcolm to that lady, with a light laugh, which, however, only partially concealed his troubled feelings; "kiss the child," he added, "for being good at last."

But Mina angrily pushed him away, and escaping from them both, fled to the solitude of her own chamber, where she could think and weep in peace.

She felt bewildered, terrified, overwhelmed; she thought of his unknown relatives, of his uncomprehended self; she reflected alternately concerning his silence, his kindness, and his reserve; she tried

to see where she was going, and with whom; wondered if he felt he were condescending to her, and whether he would not be sorry hereafter, and how he ever came to care for and to think of marrying her; she remembered Miss Caldera's advice, and Alfred Westwood's words, and Malcolm's speculations, and, bowing her flushed face in her hands, shed scalding tears of mortified pride to reflect that some people might say she had striven to catch a baronet's son—that he himself might fancy so sometime.

The idea haunted her so that she could not endure for long to hear his name uttered by either her friend or her brother; she shrunk from the mention of the subject as if she had been a party to some guilty transaction; she did not comprehend how poor and unhappy he was, and consequently attributed all sorts of proud haughty feelings to him, of which he was completely innocent; she was always glad when he was there, because then they could not talk about the proposed match, and what a good one it was; her soul sickened at the idea of marrying for a position—for money, of being a mere mercenary calculating creature.

"I am not that," she cried aloud, communing in solitude with the feelings of her heart, "I am not

that, and I have not deceived him, or ever tried to make him care for me; and, if I am doing wrong, I cannot help it. I strove to do right, and they would not let me, and I cannot see what is right—only—only—I wish he were poor like myself;" and then she grew utterly wretched, reflecting how foolishly he would feel he had acted when he found out more about what she actually was, and how estranged they were from all rich connexions, and what a lonely desolate little wanderer he had taken home.

Home! where was it? what sort would it prove? Had he sisters who would sneer at her like Cecilia, brothers who would frown darkly on her, parents who would be angry at his choice? and, as she thought of these chances, and knew how she had said "yes," and remembered she might be of use to Malcolm, that her husband would be sure to help her brother, she nerved herself up to a kind of hardened determination, steeled and fortified her soul for the event, tried to reconcile herself even to the idea of coldness, pride, neglect, haughty relatives, a comfortless home, superciliousness and contempt. "It will be a home at any rate," she said, "and if I marry I have a right to it." She never told others all the wild fears she entertained, all the sorrow she endured, but she sat for hours by her-

self—pondering and struggling and pining—and sometimes she grew quite calm externally, and, in fact, looked listlessly at the whole affair from beginning to end. The end, ah! she could not see that. It lay far away among those fens, whither she was to journey with him. He once told her the country there was very flat, ugly, and uninteresting; but that was all she knew about it, and she did not care to hear more: she fancied she should be in possession of all quite soon enough.

He had asked her, not to love, but to marry him; and she said "yes," because Malcolm had first spoken it for her, and then ordered her to repeat the word after him,—because she was sick of striving, tired of being perpetually told she ought to marry, weary of seeing her brother inactive, murmuring, discontented. She had no home—no definite expectation, present or future, of providing a happy one for herself: she imagined it was best for her to listen, at least, to advice; she sometimes argued that as she had never previously followed counsel, when it clashed with her own wishes or ideas, she must now be acting prudently in yielding to the persuasions of friends, whilst every feeling of her heart said "no" to the step they proposed.

Many trials, successive disappointments, and ac-

tual ill health had finally reduced her to that state of utter hopelessness in which many persons fly to convents, and place the irrevocable barrier of a vow betwixt them, the world, and its cares for ever; and just, in like manner, she was rushing into matrimony, as she one day told Miss Caldera, with something between a sneer and a sob, "to have done with it."

"To have done with what, my dear?" mildly inquired that lady.

"The theme matrimonial," returned Mina; "after I take this man for better for worse, you can never, thank goodness, ask me to marry again. When once I am Mrs. Ivraine, I shall at last be 'settled,' shall I not?"

"Heaven send!" devoutly murmured Miss Caldera, who sincerely entertained doubts whether the girl would ever be at rest—even in her coffin. "Heaven send!"

"Amen," said Mina, bitterly.

"You have never been settled or at peace since I knew you," remarked Miss Caldera.

"You have never let me be at peace since I knew you," retorted Mina; "but now, at length, I hope you and Malcolm are satisfied. I have accepted a man for whom I do not care a straw; am

about to enter a family of which I know nothing; am marrying from purely prudential motives: what girl could do more, even if brought up by a worldly managing mother? I have proved an apt pupil in the noble art of match-making, and yet you give me no credit for my proficiency in the science."

"I think, Mina," returned Miss Caldera severely, "that you are, without exception, the strangest, most unreasonable, most dissatisfied person I ever met with. Here you, a portionless girl, without any extraordinarily rich or high relatives, are on the eve of espousing a handsome, agreeable, elegant-looking, country gentleman, son to a baronet, rich, amiable, apparently qualified to make any woman happy; in fact, it is in every way a much better match than you could possibly, even during your uncle's life-time, have expected."

"But good gracious!" here broke in her auditor, "I never expected, I never wanted to make a grand or a good, or any kind of a match at all; I only wanted to be let alone, and, as I always said: and as you have just now confessed, had I been rich, you never would have so tormented me; and—and," she added hastily, "I wish I were dead."

"Solely, I believe, because you cannot die just at present," responded her friend; "if you could, you

would not wish it, and if you could not marry, I daresay you would think a home of your own a very haven of happiness. Mina, you are a perfect enigma to me: why, most girls would think themselves fortunate if, in your position, they could settle one half so well, and yet you talk, or rather rave—for I do not think you mean one half what you say—incessantly, as if you were a sort of martyr; in fact, I half suspect you feel as if you were one, don't you, dear?"

"I feel as if my heart were breaking," returned Mina, as she left the room, in a tone so cold and steadfast, that somehow it carried more conviction to the mind of Miss Caldera than had ever entered there before.

"Things have gone very cross with her lately, poor darling, and she can see no happiness in anything just at present," she soliloquized, for in her heart she loved the girl better than any one else on earth; even whilst she scolded and lectured and worried her life out, she felt a near and tender interest in the child of a wayward temper and a wayward destiny. She did it all for her ultimate good; she sincerely and rationally enough believed that to marry Mr. Ivraine was the very best thing the orphan could do, both for herself and her

brother; and, accordingly, she left no stone unturned to induce her to become, as Mina had once pettishly said, "a country squire's country wife."

But still there was a something so fixed, so unchangeable in Mina's mood, that the lady at length began to marvel if the marriage really would turn out as happy an affair as she had at one time anticipated it might.

She once wondered "if it were prudent;" and then again she said, "of course," because, if the girl did not wed him, what else was she to do? Work she could not, beg she might not, teach she would not—to make money as she desired, by writing, was a farce; and her brother,——no, no, there was nothing for it but a golden wedding ring: she was securing a home for herself,—employment, promotion, perhaps a brilliant destiny, for Malcolm. "It would be all right in time, quite right;" so Miss Caldera hoped, so she tried to believe, yet the doubt which had crossed her mind, made her feel vaguely, strangely uncomfortable.

The interval which elapsed from the time of Ernest's sudden proposal was truly a miserable one for all; in after days, not one of the trio ever liked to look back upon it. When, in answer to a question regarding the period for the marriage, Mina

responded, she did not care—the sooner the better, adding her customary "then it will be done with," her friend felt strongly inclined to read her a lecture concerning the sin of ingratitude generally, and hers particularly; but a look at the face of one whom she had known as a child and watched through all the struggles and sorrows of her later life,—whose story, vague, unsatisfactory, and foolish though it might have been, she had pondered on and sighed over, drove back the words as she would have uttered them, and she refrained.

Yes, they were growing very patient with, and fond of, and lenient towards her now, when patience and fondness and leniency availed not; Mina felt that, and sometimes it softened and sometimes it chafed her: she was seldom ten minutes in the same temper, though she never varied on one point, —regret that, against her will, she had been forced, as she said, into an unequal union.

One night, after a brief conversation in the usual style, to which Malcolm, sitting more thoughtful than was his wont by the fire, listened in silence, Miss Caldera said, as they arose to separate for the night,

"If you are so very averse to him, Mina, would it not be better for you to pause—to break off the marriage?"

"Yes, it's all very well to ask me that *now*," returned the girl almost fiercely; "as I have gone so far, I will go still further,—settle my destiny and myself for ever. It is too late to draw back; and, even if I could, it would be of no use: it must come to this, or something very like this, some time sooner or later, and perhaps the sooner the better."

She uttered the sentence in one rapid breath as she stopped for a moment on the staircase; and when she concluded, without waiting for answer of any kind, she ran hastily towards her own room and locked and bolted the door behind her.

"I wonder if it be a right thing," murmured Miss Caldera, half aloud, "I wonder how it will 'turn out.'"

"If evil come of it," said Malcolm sternly, in answer, "will either of us be free from blame in the matter?"

The lady coloured deeply at the unexpected remark; she seemed as if about to reply, but the words died away on her lips, and the young man, with a gloomy look in his usually thoughtless eyes, left her to her own reflections—pleasant or the reverse—as successive ideas, fears, and visions floated through her brain.

Malcolm paused, ere proceeding to his own apart-

ment, by the door of his sister's room, and listened for a moment. He heard no sob, no sigh—nothing but the sound of her light tread, and the rustle of her mourning dress, as she moved restlessly backwards and forwards, measuring with hurried footsteps the length and breadth of the small chamber; scarcely knowing what she was doing, but walking on a sort of mental treadmill, to which she had bound herself, as she fancied, for life.

"Mina," cried her brother softly, "Mina, dear, speak to me one word."

She unfastened the door and asked him what he wanted.

"It is not for me, Mina," he said, in a sort of choking way, "not for me you are doing this."

"Doing what?" she demanded.

"Marrying Mr. Ivraine; I have not forced you into this, have I?"

There was a self-reproach, a sorrow in his words that brought back the girl's love and affection for him, recalled her to a remembrance of their actual position, revived her dreams of a bright future for him, made her almost forget herself, brought their childhood vividly to mind. The light fell full on his pale troubled face; she saw he was willing, at that instant to give his consent to the match being

broken off, to renounce his darling hopes rather than incur the responsibility of pushing on the marriage; she perceived he had repented of his share in the business, that he longed for her to say it was not he who was forcing her to take a step she dreaded. A strong revulsion of feeling chased all angry emotions from her soul: she would have done anything in the world for him then; so, putting her arms about his neck, she said in a low hushed voice,

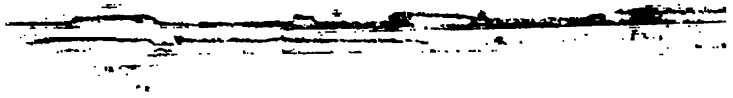
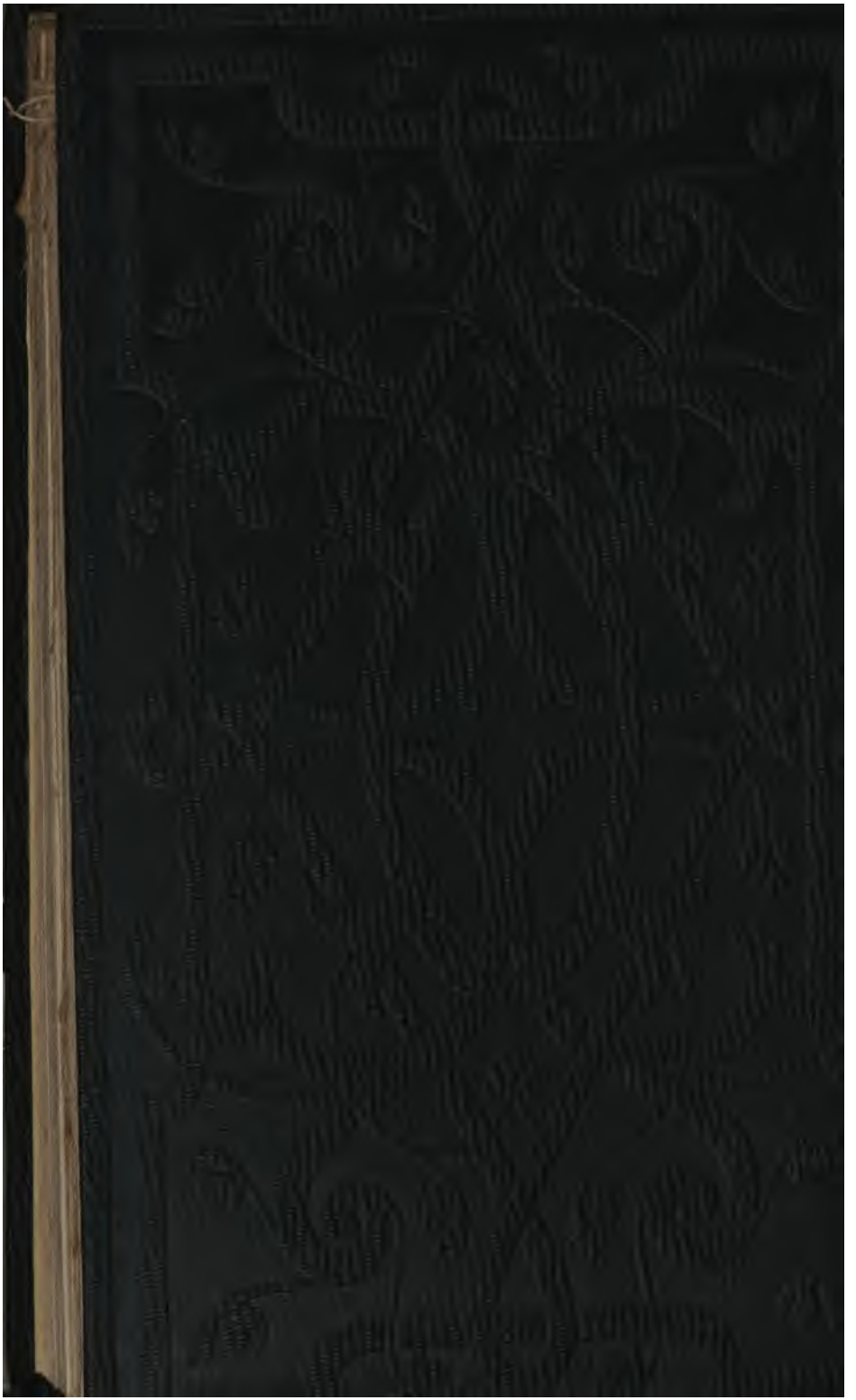
"I am marrying for a home, Malcolm; do not distress yourself: I am not very unhappy, and you shall never hear me complain more; we have both of us much reason to be thankful."

He kissed her when she concluded with a tenderness and reality of affection one could scarcely have imagined him capable of feeling: one depth of his heart had at last been sounded; and thenceforth he seemed changed, improved, subdued. And Mina,—she had effected a sort of victory over herself, and became quite calm: whatever she felt or thought, she never said. At last she was granted perfect peace on the subject,—"left," as she had often wished to be, "alone."

If they had always done that, she might have been made to care for him long before; but she was not conscious of that fact—only humbly thankful

for the silence Malcolm and Miss Caldera now generally maintained.

I wonder, however, what silence could keep an impending marriage a secret from a London maid-of-all-work. Not that, at all events, which was preserved in Miss Caldera's abode, for the young damsel who officiated in that capacity in the governess' domicile, took occasion to have a confidential chat with Mrs. Frith concerning the whole affair, and Mrs. Frith wrote down an account of the same to her father, Colin Saunders, who would, the worthy Scotchwoman fancied, be overwhelmed with joy to hear Miss Mina was to be wedded to his master's son: but the news did not seem altogether to rejoice the old man; he moped about the place for some time after receipt of that letter without speaking to anybody, during which period Mina never suspected an humble friend was grieving deeply, though silently, for her.

END OF VOLUME II.

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